OVERLORD「2」The dark warrior *Kugane Maruyama*

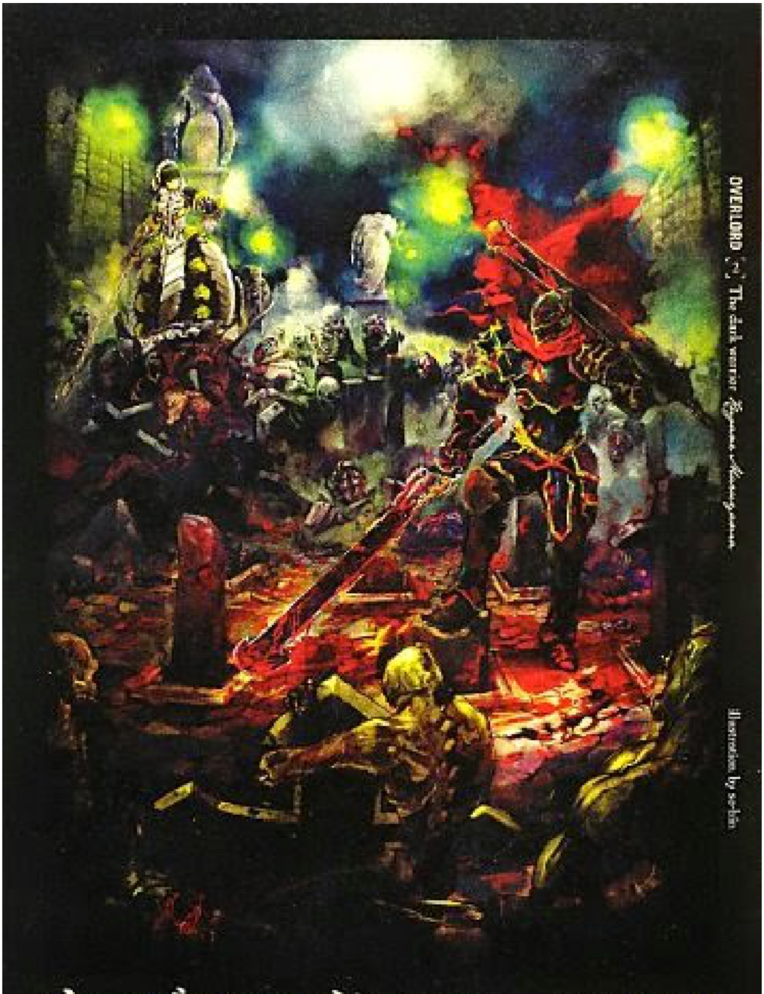
illustration by so-bin

オーバーロード 2 漆黒の戦士

丸山くがね

Overlord Volume 2 Prologue

Prologue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Translator: Nigel

Proofreader/Editor: JcqC

The supreme ruler of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick had a luxurious office.

Said office was filled with tasteful and exotic furniture, every single piece being of exquisite design and decoration. The crimson carpet upon the floor was thick and soft, swallowing the footsteps of those who trod upon it. Flags bearing assorted insignia hung upon the walls in the depths of the room.

An imposing mahogany desk sat in the center of the office. Its owner sat behind it, upon a black leather chair.

If one were to describe that man in one phrase — dressed as he was in a long, black robe which seemed to absorb the light — then he would have to be an “Overlord of Death”.

His exposed head was a fleshless skull. The points of crimson light within its empty eye sockets were blended with faint traces of darkness.

This was the man once known as Momonga, who had now taken on the name of the guild, Ainz Ooal Gown.

Ainz meshed his skeletal fingers together. The nine rings on those fingers glittered as they reflected the magical radiance of [Continual Light] spells.

“Good grief… where shall I go from here?”

YGGDRASIL was a Dive Massively Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Game, which allowed its players to immerse themselves in virtual reality and experience their adventures within the game world with their own bodies. It had been eight days since its last day of service — when Ainz had been mysteriously transferred to a new world in the form of his character from the game.

During this time, Ainz had studied the conditions and vassals of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick and learned about the various differences between this place and the game world. Now, he was deciding on what he should do next.

“All shall proceed as you desire,” the beautiful woman replied to Ainz’s muttering.

She was a world-class beauty in a pure white dress, whose faint smile made her resemble a goddess. Her long black hair was lustrous and silky, in stark contrast with the color of her dress, and it reached down to her waist. However, she was not a human being.

Her golden pupils were vertically slit, and a pair of curling, ram-like horns protruded from both her temples. In addition, a pair of black-feathered wings grew from her hips and covered her legs.

“Is that so, Albedo? I am pleased by your loyalty.”

She was the Guardian Overseer of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, Albedo. She was the Non-Player Character (NPC) who was in charge of the seven Floor Guardians.

When Ainz and his guildmates built the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick in the past, Albedo had been created as to work for them as an underling. However, she was now sentient and had pledged her undying loyalty to Ainz.

While this situation pleased Ainz, on the flip side of things, he had only been a lowly salaryman in his previous life, and so all this placed a great deal of stress on him, be it from having to act like a proper master in front of his subordinates or running Nazarick smoothly as its ruler.

The biggest problem was the sheer lack of information about this new world he currently inhabited.

“…Then, how about the next report?”

“Here, Ainz-sama.”

Ainz accepted the document from Albedo and immediately began scanning through it. The circular characters had been written with a fountain pen.

This particular report came from Aura Bella Fiora, Guardian of the Sixth Floor.

It stated that they had not yet made contact with YGGDRASIL players like Ainz, nor had they found any trace of them. She had done a search of the forest near the Great Underground Tomb, and she had found a lake among the foothills of the mountain range at the end of the forest.

Ainz nodded. Relief flooded through him as he learned that they had not found the beings in this world of which he was most wary — other players.

“I understand. Tell Aura and her people to continue carrying out my orders.”

“Unders—”

A quiet knocking came from the door. Albedo glanced at Ainz’s expression, then bowed deeply and headed to the door. After verifying the identity of the visitor, Albedo replied:

“Shalltear seeks an audience.”

“Shalltear? That’s fine, let her in.”

After receiving Ainz's permission to enter, a girl of around 14 years of age elegantly entered the office.
She wore a black ballroom gown with a bell-like skirt. Her skin was as pale as wax, and her perfectly-proportioned face was that of a world-class beauty. Her long silver hair swayed as she walked, and her ample bosom — which did not match her age — wobbled mightily with every step that she took.

She was the Guardian of the 1st to 3rd Floors, the "True Ancestor", Shalltear Bloodfallen.

"Greetings, Ainz-sama."

"The same to you, Shalltear. Why have you come to my room today?"

"Naturally, it was to admire your handsome features, Ainz-sama."

While there was obviously no expression on Ainz's skeletal face, the crimson points of light in his eyesockets flared brightly.

At first, he wanted to tell her to dispense with the pleasantries, but Ainz swallowed those words. However, he could see the smile on Albedo's face twisting as she looked upon Shalltear's crimson eyes, whose pupils were slowly filling with arousal.

It was still a smile, and her beauty was not diminished in the slightest, but it was no longer a pleasant expression.

Rather, it resembled the grinning of a demon.

Still, Ainz quietly breathed a sigh of relief, because Albedo was staring at Shalltear, and not himself.

"Then, seeing as you have looked your fill, you may leave, Shalltear. Ainz-sama and I are currently deciding the future of the Great

Underground Tomb of Nazarick. Would you mind not interfering with our important work?”

“…It is basic courtesy to greet someone politely before launching into the main issue… Aged old hags are so annoying. Could it be they’re desperate because they’re past their expiry date?”

“…Don’t you think that food without an expiry date because it’s stuffed full of preservatives is the same as poison? Expired food would be safer compared to that, don’t you think?”

“…I’d advise you not to look down on food poisoning. You might get an infection.”

“…The important thing is whether it can be eaten, right? Compared to what looks like a large display of food, but the truth is… well, you know what I mean, right?”

“…A food display? You’ll die for that, bitch.”

“…Now who’s the expired goods, hmph.”

The looks on the feuding belles before Ainz could chill a 100 million year-old love.

Ainz decided to speak up before the two of them could no longer hold their impulses back and started ripping into each other.

“That’s enough playing around, you two.”

Their faces blossomed into beaming smiles as they heard his command. Their previous expressions were gone, and now they were but two innocent, adorable girls.

Women are really scary… no, it’s just these two who are especially scary…

After becoming undead, any strong emotions Ainz experienced were immediately suppressed. Even so, he felt that the speed at which they had changed their expression was quite frightening.

The two of them were at each other’s throats because they were rivals in love.

Albedo and Shalltear were both infatuated with Ainz. Any man who was unhappy with receiving the affections of two such gorgeous women was no man at all.

However, Ainz could not bring himself to accept their feelings just like that.

The main reason was because the necrophiliac Shalltear had once whispered sweetly into his ear, “This beautiful bone structure must have come from the hands of a divine Creator”.

To Shalltear, these words might have been a mumbled expression of love — or perhaps they were praise — but they were a great shock to Ainz. After all, this was the first time in his life that he had been complimented on his looks — but it was as a skeleton. It had been several days since then, but he was still shaken.

Ainz shook his head to banish those meaningless memories and replied:

“I ask you once more, Shalltear. Do you have anything else for me?”

“Yes. I will be meeting Sebas afterwards in order to fulfil the task set to me. Since I may not be able to return to Nazarick for some time, I came to bid farewell to you before I left.”

Ainz remembered that he had given her such a task, and nodded.

“I see. Then, Shalltear, take care when accomplishing your task and return home safely.”

“Yes!” she replied in a bright and clear voice.

“Then, you may leave, Shalltear. Also, as you go, tell Narberal or Entoma to send Demiurge over. Tell him I need to discuss contingency plans with him.”

“Understood, Ainz-sama.”

Overlord Volume 2 Chapter 1

The Two Adventurers

OVERLORD 「2」 The dark warrior
1章 二人の冒険者

Translator: Nigel

Proofreader/Editor: JcqC

Part 1

The Fortress City of E-Rantel stood at the intersection of three borders — those of the Slaine Theocracy, the Baharuth Empire, and the Re-Estize Kingdom. It was so named because it was defended by three layers of walls. The districts enclosed by each concentric circle of the walls were distinctly different from each other.

The outermost district was sometimes used to billet the troops from the Royal Army, and so it was fully furnished with barracks and other military facilities.

The innermost district was the administrative area of the city. In addition, the district also contained storehouses for combat rations. Thus, it was heavily guarded.

Between these two areas was the residential district, where the people of E-Rantel made their homes. This place best fit the image that came to mind when one thought of a city.

There were several plazas here, and the largest of them was called the Central Plaza. It was filled with stalls selling vegetables, spices and other such commercial products.

Amidst the crowds, the stall-owners energetically shouted their sales pitches to the people walking by, while the older women haggled with the merchants as they looked for fresh food. Drawn by fragrant scents, young men purchased skewers of roasted meat which oozed with warm juices.

The rowdy, energetic atmosphere of this place should have lasted until the sun went down. However, it suddenly went silent as a pair of figures emerged from a five-story building nearby.

Everyone in the plaza froze where they stood, their eyes were drawn to the two of them.

One of these two people was a girl, who looked to be in her late teens. Her tapered eyes gleamed like onyxes, while her thick and lustrous black hair was tied into a ponytail. Her snow-white skin shone like pearls in the sun.

What drew their attention most was the air of elegance which surrounded her, followed closely by her exotic beauty that would make anyone do a double take. Although the dark brown robe she wore was plain in make, it looked like an opulent dress on her.

The gender of her partner was unclear. Or rather, there was no way to tell her partner's gender.

Someone muttered: “Dark Warrior”.

Indeed, that person was sheathed in an intricately engraved suit of full plate armor that was edged in gold. There was no way to see that person's face through the narrow slits of the closed helm which that person wore. A pair of greatswords were visible below that person's flowing red cape, and they looked as impressive as that person's armor.

The two of them looked around, and the fully armored person took a step forward.

The onlookers watched the pair vanish into the distance, and then immediately began whispering about what they had seen. They did not seem afraid of their arms and armor.

That was because the building the pair had just left was called the “Adventurer's Guild”. It was a place that only monster-hunting professionals would visit, so it was hardly strange to see armed people coming out of there. In fact, several other similarly equipped people had left the building in the meantime. Those with keen eyes might have noticed a pair of copper plates hanging around the necks of that pair.

That said, the two of them had drawn all that attention because of the woman’s beauty and her partner’s magnificent set of full plate.

♦♦♦

The pair walked quietly down a narrow road.

Sunlight reflected off the water caught in wagon-ruts on the road. Unlike proper cobbled roads, said water mixed with the earth and sand, which made for treacherous footing. A moment’s carelessness might have led to a fall, but the two of them possessed excellent balance, and so they moved along the road almost as quickly as a proper one.

After verifying that there was nobody else around them, the light-footed woman turned to the fully-armored person beside her and said:

“Ainz-sa—”

“—No, my name is Momon. Neither are you Narberal Gamma, battle maid (Pleiades) of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, but Nabe, Momon’s adventuring partner.”

The person in full plate — Ainz — interrupted the girl — Narberal — halfway through her reply.

“Ah! My apologies, Momon-sama.”

“Also, don’t call me -sama. We are simple adventurers, and companions. It would be weird to address me like that.”

“B-but! How could I possibly be so disrespectful to the Supreme One?”

Ainz gestured at Narberal to keep her voice down. She had raised it in her excitement. Then, in a tone that was somewhere between resignation and helplessness, he replied:

“Like I’ve already said, several times, in this place I am Momon the Dark… no, just Momon, and your partner. So don’t call me -sama. That’s an order.”

After a short silence, Narberal reluctantly replied:

“Understood, Momon-sa—n.”

“Forget it, this is fine too. Actually, dropping the -san would be good as well. After all, how shall I say this, addressing your partner as -san might make people think there’s a distance between us.”

“But… would that not be too disrespectful...?”

Ainz shrugged as Narberal mumbled.

“We cannot reveal our true identities. You understand that, right?”

“Of course.”

“...Your tone… mm, forget it. In any case… what I want to say is that you must be very careful in your words and actions.”

“...Understood, Momon-sa—san. However, is it really all right for me to accompany you? Would not the beautiful and gentle Albedo-sama be better for this task?”

“Albedo…”

Ainz’s words betrayed his complicated feelings as he replied:

“I need her to manage Nazarick for me while I am travelling.”

“...Though I fear to offend you, could the task of running Nazarick not be given to Cocytus-sama? The Guardians all say this too… that for the sake of your safety, Albedo-sama is the best choice as your companion. Do you not think so?”

Narberal’s question made Ainz smile bitterly.

Among all the Guardians, Albedo had objected the most strenuously when Ainz had announced his decision to visit E-Rantel. It began when she learned that she would not be able to accompany Ainz on his journey.

After the transition to this mysterious new world, Ainz had gone for a walk without his vassals, something which Albedo blamed herself for. Thus he could not rebuke her too harshly. However, this was a deliberate expedition, unlike the stroll he had taken last time, and so he had to stick to his guns.

As a Guardian she would obey his orders without fail, even if they conflicted with her own opinions. Yet, Ainz did not think of that as a good thing. All the Guardians were the product of his fellow guild members’ hard work, and he felt guilty about forcing his will upon them.

Therefore, Ainz tried to persuade Albedo — who staunchly disagreed with him — to come around to his way of thinking. However, neither of them could accept the others’ opinions. At first, Ainz thought they would be deadlocked forever, but after Demiurge whispered something into Albedo’s ear, her resistance suddenly evaporated. In the end, she fully approved of his journey and even sent him off with a smile.

Until now, he still did not know what Demiurge had said to her. Ainz was a little uneasy about what could have made Albedo reverse her opinion so suddenly.

“...I did not bring her along because I trust her more than anyone else. It is because she is in Nazarick that I can leave it in peace.”

“I see! In other words, Albedo-sama is the closest person to you, Momon-sa—n?”

While he did not reply, “Mm, well, kind of,” he did nod in response to Narberal’s question.

“I am fully aware that this is potentially dangerous.”

Ainz raised his gauntleted right hand and wiggled its ring finger.

“However, I must go in person. If I stay in Nazarick, there is a chance that I might make a miscalculation. Therefore, I need to personally make contact with the outside world… Indeed, there are other methods I could use, but all of them make me uneasy, given that there is so little we know about the situation.”

Narberal replied, “I see” with a look of understanding on her face. Ainz narrowed his eyes at her through the slits of his helmet, and then asked in a somewhat uneasy tone:

“Incidentally, I have a question… Do you think humans are inferior lifeforms?”

“Yes, they are. Humans are worthless trash.”

Narberal delivered her answer with firm conviction and without a moment’s hesitation. Ainz muttered, “Ah, so you felt that way too,” but his voice was too soft to reach Narberal’s ears.

After that, he continued grumbling, “I didn’t want to bring her along because her personality makes her react poorly to humans. Looks like I should have been certain of my subordinates’ personalities beforehand. ”

One of the reasons why he had not taken Albedo with him was because she firmly believed that humans were inferior lifeforms. If he brought someone like that into a highly-populated city and then took his eyes off her for just a moment, there was a very real possibility that he might look back to find a gore-soaked abattoir. In addition, Albedo had no disguise skills and could not conceal her horns and wings, which was another point against her.
The greatest reason, however, was one that he could never speak out loud.

That was the fact that Ainz was a mere salaryman, and he had no confidence in running an organization if he had to rely on reports from others, with no direct observation on his part. Because of that, he handed the task of managing the Nazarick to the talented Albedo. If one had a capable subordinate, allowing them to take charge was a wise gesture; interference from an incompetent superior would only lead to tragedy.

In addition Albedo was bound to Ainz by the twin shackles of “love” and “loyalty”. That was why Ainz could leave the operations of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick to her.

Love, huh...

Every time he saw Albedo, and every time she declared her love for him, Ainz was reminded of the mistake he made in altering Albedo’s settings. Indeed, in the last moments before the game ended, he had changed Albedo’s character settings so that she would deeply love Momonga — in other words, Ainz. Of course, he did not know that he would be transported to this new world. It had merely been a final, little joke.

Still, when he thought about it — even if Albedo did not mind — what would his friend Tabula Smaragdina think about what Ainz had done?

What if it were himself? What if his comrades had interfered with his hand-created NPC (Pandora's Actor)...

Worse still, he had made use of Albedo's absolute loyalty toward him for his own gain. He hated himself for that.

Ainz shook his head to clear away these dark thoughts. Although his undead body automatically suppressed any strong emotions he felt, he still experienced petty emotions like those as keenly as he had when he was human. When he fully assumed an undead state of mind, perhaps he would no longer feel that sense of guilt.

Distracted by these thoughts, the helmed Ainz turned to Narberal and said:

"...Nabe, I won't tell you to cast away those thoughts, but at the very least, you must control yourself. This is a human town, and we do not know what exceptional individuals they have among them. Therefore, we should try our best not to make enemies."

Narberal bowed deeply to him to show her loyalty and obedience. Ainz extended his hand to her, to bid her raise her head. Then he continued:

"There is one more thing. When we intend to fight in earnest, we might radiate a… killing intent, which humans might be able to sense. Well, something like that might happen. Therefore, you are not to get serious without my permission. Do you understand?"

"I understand, Momon-sa—n."

"Very good… Then, the inn we heard about should be nearby."

Ainz looked around.
There were several shops open for business nearby, their customers filing in and out of them. To the side were several people

in work aprons, carrying goods.

In this densely-populated commercial district, Ainz and Narberal had to look for the inn by inspecting the pictures on the shops' signs. This was because neither of them could read this country's language.

Before long, Ainz found the picture that he was looking for. His steps quickened, and Narberal followed suit.

He scraped off the mud caked on his sabatons, climbed the steps to the western-style saloon doors, and opened them with both hands.

The windows were closed, and so the interior was somewhat dark. People who were used to the light outside would probably not be able to see their hands stretched out in front of their faces. However, Ainz possessed darkvision, and he could see clearly with this meager amount of illumination.

The inside of the building was quite spacious. The first floor was a dining area, with a counter further within. That counter was backed by shelves that contained dozens of bottles of alcohol. The door beside the counter most likely led to a kitchen.

A spiral staircase turned up in the corner of the dining area. According to the receptionist at the guild, the guest rooms were located on the second and third floors. One could see the scattered customers within seated around several round tables. Almost all of them were men, and the promise of violence hung heavily over them.

Everyone's attention was on Ainz. They looked at him as though they were sizing him up. The only person who did not pay attention to Ainz was a woman seated in a corner. She was staring intently at a small bottle on her table.

This tavern scene made Ainz furrow his nonexistent brows under his helmet.

He had expected this sort of thing, but this place was filthier than he had imagined.

There were dirty and disgusting places in YGGDRASIL, of course. Even the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick which Ainz ruled over contained such places, such as Kyouhukou's room, the Venomous Cave, and so on.

However, the filth here was different from those places.

The floor was covered in scraps of mysterious food and unknown liquids, while the walls were stained and there were chunks of some moldy substance in the corners of the room...

Ainz sighed internally, and looked into the tavern.

A man in a dirty apron stood there, his stout arms protruding from his rolled-up sleeves. They were covered in several scars, and Ainz could not tell if they were caused by the claws of wild beasts, or by blades of some sort.

He looked somewhere between imposing and bestial, and there were scars on his face as well. His head was shaved completely bald, without a single hair left standing on his scalp.

This man, who looked more like a bouncer than an innkeeper, sized up Ainz as he held a mop in one hand.

“A room, huh. For how long?” a voice like a broken bell called out to Ainz.

“We wish to stay for one night.”

The innkeeper replied crudely: “...A copper-plate, huh. A night is five coppers. The food’s oatmeal and vegetables; meat’s an extra copper. Might be getting days-old bread instead of the oatmeal.”

“If it is at all possible, I would like a double room.”

Ainz thought he could hear the man snorting.

“...In this town, there’s three inns that cater to adventurers, and mine’s the worst of these three… you know why the guild sent you here?”

“I do not. Could you tell me why?”

Faced with Ainz’s answer, the innkeeper furrowed his frown and turned a frightening look upon him.

“Use your brains a little! Or is that flashy helmet of yours empty inside, huh?!”

Ainz remained calm, despite the innkeeper’ annoyed retort. Perhaps his ability to weather this childish tantrum was the result of experiencing that battle several days ago.

That battle — as well as the information squeezed out of the prisoners they had taken — had allowed Ainz to understand how powerful he was. Because of that, he could calmly face this shouting.

The innkeeper seemed surprised to see Ainz’s reaction, and said:

“...You’ve got some guts, huh… The people who stay here are mostly copper or iron-plate adventurers. If you’ve got some strength, you can form a party here, if you’re lucky. Therefore, there’s no better place than this to find party members whose strength matches yours…”

Something seemed to flash through the innkeeper's eyes.

"It's fine if you want to sleep in a room, but if you don't make contacts here, you won't be able to find party members. If you can't form a well-balanced, strong team, you'll die out there against the monsters. That's why novices with no comrades advertise themselves in places with a lot of people. So I'll ask you one more time: do you want to sleep in the dormitory or in a double room, huh?"

"A double room. And I'll pass on the food."

"Cheh, another punk who doesn't appreciate others' kindness… or are you trying to say that you're something else and that full plate isn't for show? Ah, forget it, that'll be seven coppers a night. Upfront, of course."

The innkeeper extended his hand in one smooth motion.

Ainz stepped forward, followed by Narberal. The two of them were bathed in the appraising looks of everyone in the room — when suddenly, someone stuck a foot into Ainz's path, as though to prevent Ainz from moving forward.

Ainz halted, and turned to the man who had stuck his foot out.

He had an annoying smile on his face, which was mirrored by everyone else at his table. They stared at Ainz and Narberal.

Neither the innkeeper or the other customers stepped forward to stop this. They were watching silently.

Although everyone seemed to be uninterested in the proceedings, or looking forward to a good show, there were quite a few of them who were intently studying the situation.

Give me a break...

Ainz sighed, and lightly kicked away the foot in front of him.

The man suddenly stood up, as though he had been waiting just for that. Since he was unarmored, his bulging muscles were clearly visible under his clothes. He had a necklace like Ainz did, but his was an iron plate, which swayed as the man moved.

“Oi, oi, that hurt.”

The man approached Ainz, speaking in a threatening manner as he did. He had a gauntlet on his hand, which he must have put on while standing up. It creaked as he clenched his fist.

The two of them were roughly the same height, and they glared at each other with wrathful eyes. It seemed a bit too close for a fistfight. Ainz decided to fire the first shot:

“Is that so. I must have missed the foot in front of me because of this closed helm, or perhaps your leg was just too short… well, that’s my excuse, can you forgive me for that?”

“...Bastard.”

A dangerous look crept into the man’s eyes as Ainz’s taunt sank in. However, he turned his angry gaze to Narberal, who was standing behind Ainz, plastering his eyes on her.

“You’re an annoying fellow… But I’m a generous man. As long as you lend me your woman for a night, I’ll forgive you.”

“Ku, kukuku…”

Ainz could not help but sneer at the man, and he lightly raised his hand to keep Narberal from stepping forward.

"...What's so funny?"

"Oh, it's nothing. I couldn't help but laugh at the way you sound like a stereotypical punk. Don't worry about it."

"Wha?"

The angry man's face flushed red.

"Ah, before we start, can I ask a question? Are you stronger than Gazef Stronoff?"

"Wha? The hell are you talking about?"

"I see, it's all clear from your reaction. If it's like that, then I won't even need to play with you."

Ainz swiftly grabbed the man by the neck, and then hoisted his body off the ground.

The man could not even dodge, much less resist the sudden clinch. He went "Uoh!" in surprise as he was lifted up. The men around him who were watching the show only added to the excitement. How strong was this guy, if he could lift a grown man with one arm? The imaginations of everyone present were now considering that topic.

A wave of surprise and consternation swept the inn. As though to shatter the atmosphere of shock in the air, Ainz raised the man — whose legs were dangling and kicking furiously — and gently tossed him away.

Well, it was gentle for Ainz.

The thrown man flew in a neat trajectory with frightening speed, skimming the ceiling as he went, and fell heavily to the ground.

The sounds of the man’s body striking a nearby table, an object on the table breaking, the planks of the table splitting apart and the man’s own howls of pain blended together and echoed through the tavern. Then, the whole place fell silent, as though startled by the noise. However—

“Ogyaaaa—!”

—A beat later, the woman seated at that table emitted a strange wail. It was a cry of despair that a soul might make as it rose to heaven.
No, it would only be natural to scream like this if a man suddenly fell out of the sky and landed in front of someone. There was another reason here, mixed into the shocked cry.

“...Then, what do the rest of you plan to do? Can you save me the trouble and come all at once? It’s foolish to waste time on things like this.”

Ainz’s words were directed at the other men seated at the table of the fellow he had just thrown. They immediately got his meaning, and hurriedly lowered their heads.

“Ah? N-no! Our buddy offended you! We’re very sorry!”

“...Mm. I forgive you. Besides, it hardly inconvenienced me. However, you had best pay the innkeeper for that table.”

“Of, of course! We will pay the full price!”

Just as Ainz felt the matter was at an end and turned away, a voice froze him in his tracks.

“Wait wait wait!”

Turning around, he saw the woman who had made that weird cry just now. She was stomping up to him.

She looked to be in her twenties or younger, and her red hair was messily-cut, yet at a good length for movement. It could not be described as neat by any stretch of the word. To be more precise, it resembled a bird's nest.

She had a pretty face and a keen edge to her eyes. She did not wear makeup, and her healthy body was tanned brown by the sun. Her arms were muscular and her palms were covered in calluses from wielding a sword. The word that first came to mind when he saw her was not "woman", but "warrior".

A small iron plate hung around her chest, and it shook mightily with every step she took.

"See what you've done!"

"What have I done?"

"Hah!? Don't you even know what you did?"

The woman pointed at the shattered table.

"You threw that guy over and broke my potion, my precious potion!"

"And?"

"And?! You—!"

Her gaze sharpened further, and her tone became low and dangerous.

"Pay me back for my potion."

"...It's just a potion…"

“...I starved and scrimped and saved to buy that potion today! And now you broke it! I’ve always believed that I could get through a dangerous adventure as long as I had a potion, but now you’ve shattered my hopes and dreams! And you’ve still got an attitude like that? Ahhhh, it makes me so mad!”

The woman drew closer to Ainz.

It seemed like a wild bull had just seen red and was approaching him.

Ainz suppressed a sigh at himself. Indeed, he had made a mistake by throwing the man without thinking about where he might land. However, Ainz had his own reasons for not paying compensation that easily.

“...How about asking that man to pay you back? If he hadn’t stuck his short leg out, this tragedy would not have taken place. Am I wrong?”

Ainz’s gaze swept across the man’s buddies through the slit of his helmet.

“Ah, yes, that’s right…”

“However…”

“Forget it, I don’t care who pays me back as long as it’s a potion or its equivalent in cash… although, that potion was worth one gold and ten silvers.”

The men lowered their heads. It would seem they did not have the money to pay. Thus, the girl turned on Ainz again.

“As I thought, these drunkards wouldn’t have that sort of money. Well, seeing as you’re dressed in such a flashy suit of armor, surely you must have a healing potion, right?”

No wonder, Ainz thought. So that was why this woman was asking Ainz to pay up.

He thought briefly about it, composed himself, and replied:

“It’s not like I don’t.. although, that was a recovery potion, am I correct?”

“Indeed. I saved up for every little—”

“—All right, I get it, that’s enough. I’ll pay you back with another potion, and we’ll be even.”

Ainz handed her a Minor Healing Potion. She looked at the potion bottle in surprise, then reluctantly accepted it.

“...This should be fine, right?”

“...Mm, I guess.”

The woman seemed to have more to say, but Ainz cast aside his doubts. The more important thing was his uneasiness over whether Narberal would do something big and blow their cover.

Narberal still had a combative look in her eyes, even though Ainz had already chided her. Some of them seemed to sense her hostility and felt uneasy.

“Let’s go,” Ainz curtly told Narberal. They went before the innkeeper and Ainz withdrew a single silver piece from his leather purse before placing it on the crudely-made counter.

The innkeeper silently slipped it into his pant pocket and returned Ainz several copper pieces.

“Mm. Here’s six coppers back.”

He placed the copper coins onto Ainz’s gauntleted hand, and then laid a small key on the counter.

“First room on the right once you go up the stairs. You can put your gear into the chests at the foot of the bed. This goes without saying, but don’t barge into people’s rooms without permission. Might lead to trouble if someone gets the wrong idea. Although, it’s a pretty good way to let people know you. You look like the sort who can handle all kinds of problems. Just don’t give *me* a problem.”

The innkeeper narrowed his eyes at the man that Ainz had thrown, who was moaning on the floor.

“Understood. Also, I’ll need a basic adventurer’s kit for us. We’ve lost some of our things and the Guild said that you’d prepare one for us if we asked.”

The innkeeper looked at Ainz and Narberal, and then looked straight at Ainz’s purse.

“Mm, I got it. I’ll get it ready by dinner. Just be ready to pay.”

“Understood. Then, Nabe, let’s go.”

Ainz brought Narberal up the old staircase. The wood creaked under his feet as he headed for his room.

♦♦♦

After Ainz’s silhouette vanished up at the second floor, the buddies of the man which Ainz threw rushed up and began casting curative magic on him. Their actions seemed to be the spark which caused the silent tavern to burst into clamor.

“...It seems he’s as strong as he looks.”

“Yeah, that’s it. His arm strength is unbelievable, how did he train it?”

“He must be pretty confident to carry no weapons besides those two greatswords.”

“Dammit, another guy’s going to leap ahead of us as well.”

The scattered conversations were filled with awe, surprise, and fear.

They all knew that Ainz was not an ordinary person.

The first reason for that was his impressive equipment. Full plate armor was hardly cheap, and one would need to have gone on many adventures — in other words, be an experienced adventurer — in order to purchase it. One would need to be at least a silver-plate in order to accumulate enough capital for such a feat. However, some people inherited their suits from their predecessors, or found those suits on the battlefield or in ruins.

That was why they wanted to take a measure of his ability.

Everyone here was a comrade and a competitor at the same time. They all wanted to know the strength of any newcomers. The circumstances from just now had occurred in the past as well, over and over again.

The truth was, everyone here had experienced this sort of thing in the past. However, none of them had passed the test so easily before. In other words, that pair of copper-ranked adventurers...

They would be very strong, either as rivals or allies. Everyone here was fully convinced of that.

“Now, how should we deal with those two?”

“Flirting with that beautiful woman is out of the question…”

“If only we could get them into our party…”

“You must be mistaken, they should be in our party.”

“What does he look like under that helmet?”

“I’ll go listen on their wall tonight.”

“Didn’t he mention the region’s strongest man, Gazef Stronoff?”

“Could it be that he’s a disciple of the Warrior-Captain?”

“That’s certainly possible. Leave this task to a big-eared thief like me!”

As the crowd eagerly discussed the mysterious pair, the innkeeper walked up to one of the adventurers.

She was holding the potion Ainz had given her just now.

“Oi, Britta.”

“Hm? What?”

The woman — Britta — turned her eyes away from staring at the red potion and looked disinterestedly at the innkeeper.

“What kind of potion is that?”

“Who knows?”

“...Oi oi, you don’t know either? You accepted his potion as compensation, shouldn’t you know its value?”

“How could I? Besides, I’ve never seen a potion like this before.

Gramps, you came here because you were curious too, right?”

Britta was right.

“Does it cover the value of your potion that got smashed? This might end up being cheaper than the one you bought.”

“That’s true. It’s definitely a gamble, but one I’m confident of winning. This was something that guy in the flashy armor gave me after he heard the price of my potion.”

“I see…”

“...I’ve never seen a healing potion of this color before. It might be a rare treasure. If I delayed and he said he would pay in cash, I’d be coming back from the dragon’s den with nothing to show for it, right? In any case, I’ll take it for appraisal tomorrow and find out how much it’s worth.”

“Oh, in that case, I’ll cover the appraisal fee for you. In fact, I’ll even recommend a good place for you to visit.”

“You will, gramps?”

Britta furrowed her brows. The innkeeper was a good man, but he was hardly a Good Samaritan either. He must have something in mind.

“Ah, don’t look at me like that. I just want you to tell me the effects of this potion.”

“So it’s a trade, then?”

“Hey, it’s a good trade, right? Besides, I can recommend a really good herbalist to you through my connections. I’m talking about that Lizzie Bareare.”

Britta’s eyes went wide with surprise.

E-Rantel was a place with many mercenaries and adventurers. It specialized in selling weapons and other items to these people, and among them the trade in potions was quite brisk. Therefore, E-Rantel had more herbalists than a normal city.

Amidst this fierce competition, Lizzie Bareare had earned fame as the best herbalist in the region. She could make the most complex potions of all the herbalists in the city. Since the innkeeper had mentioned her by name, Britta had no way of refusing his offer.

Part 2

The wooden door closed with a *thud*.

The room was bare, apart from a pair of crudely-made bed frames with accompanying chests. After opening the windowblinds, they could directly feel the sunlight and outside air.

Ainz was somewhat disappointed as he finished his circular sweep of the room. Although he could not expect Nazarick-level furnishings and cleanliness in a godforsaken place like this, he still wanted to get out of here.

“I can’t believe he would dare let you stay in a place like this, Momon-sama.”

“Don’t say that, Nabe. Our aim is to become adventurers, and then increase our fame to the point where everyone knows of us. Until then, it won’t hurt to experience the life of a newbie.”

Ainz tried to soothe Narberal after closing the window blinds, without expressing his own dissatisfaction. There was not enough sunlight coming in through the blinds to light up the entire room. Ainz and Nabe both possessed darkvision, so it was hardly an obstacle to them, but for a normal person, this room would be so dark that they would have trouble seeing.

“Still… the life of an adventurer is pretty banal.”

Adventurers.

Once, Ainz dreamed about that profession.

He envisioned them as people who chased after the unknown and had adventures in various parts of the world. Ainz had previously thought that adventurers were a physical manifestation of the right way to play YGGDRASIL, but after listening to the Guild receptionist, he realised that adventuring was a more realistic and more boring job than he had expected.

Simply put, adventurers were “anti-monster mercenaries”.

Although some parts of it fit his dreams of them — for instance, delving into the ruins of kingdoms destroyed by the Demon Gods 200 years ago and investigating mysteries in uncharted lands — for the most part, they were simply monster hunters.

Every monster possessed different special abilities, so they could only be taken care of by people who knew more tricks than average soldiers.

Just going by that point, one might think that they were heroes who were loved and relied on by the common man, like in games.

However, the reality was somewhat different from that.

This was because the ruling authorities did not smile on the existence of armed groups which they could not control. Therefore, aside from the prices they commanded, adventurers did not have much status.

Another reason why adventurers were not accepted on a national scale was because of the same thinking which made companies look for cheap, local temps than employing expensive permanent staff. Thus, much like how temps were treated by companies who could get by without hiring them, adventurers were held in lower regard in those nations which could eliminate monsters by dint of their own military power.

According to the Guild receptionist, there were no adventurers in the Slaine Theocracy, while life had gotten worse for adventurers in the Baharuth Empire after the ascension of their new Emperor.

Ainz banished his mild disappointment from his heart. It was a common thing in life to find that a job which one admired was hardly as glamorous in reality.

With a brief wave of his hand, the black armor and the two greatswords on his back melted away into nothingness, and a skeleton bedecked in magic items was revealed.

He wore a pair of black mirrorshades and a red targeting sight. The silver circlet on his head was set with amethysts and thorns grew from it, making it look like a rose vine.

Then there were the long-sleeved shirt and slacks, made of a lustrous, gauzy black material. A black belt secured the pants around his waist.

Ainz took off the sturdy gauntlets, and there were rings on all his bony fingers save the left ring finger.

His half-boots were made of a reddish-brown leather, and they were embroidered with gold thread.

A silver necklace with a lion-head pendant hung around his neck, and around it was a red cape.

Magic items in YGGDRASIL were made by infusing an item skin with a data crystal, so it was quite difficult to coordinate their appearance. However, many players disliked wearing a clownsuit, so after a certain update, players were given several ways to change their equipments' appearance without changing their gear. (TL note: ”clownsuit” is the MMO term for a visually mismatched set of equipment only worn for their stat boosts)

The suit of finely articulated black plate armor, made by the [Create Greater Item] spell, was one of those ways.

Currently, Ainz was wearing Sure-Hit Glasses, a Crown of Mental Fortitude, Black Widow Spider Clothes, a Black Belt, the Jarngreipr from earlier, a Nemean Lion pendant, Haste Boots, and so on.

In YGGDRASIL, trading in magic items was usually done in the form of data crystals. However, there were people who sold second-hand items in order to make even stronger ones. It was at this point that a problem arose — the names of magic items made by other people might include forbidden language, or it might insult someone. Sometimes, the GMs would ask the players in question to rename the items.

In general, naming items was left to the fancy of the creator.

As a result, items with weird names were not very popular on the market. Although cash items which could rename them were not expensive, very few people wanted to make that expenditure.

Thus, every player racked their brains to give their items good names. Sometimes the names would be in English, or they would come from mythology.

Of course, there were exceptions to this as well.

For instance, naming rings was very troublesome, so most people tended to call them Ring1, Ring2, Ring3 and so on. Ainz had even seen someone who called them Thumb Ring, Index Finger Ring, Middle Finger Ring, and so on.

Ainz had a friend called Warrior Takemikazuchi, who wielded two katanas from time to time. He named one of them — the eighth of its line — "Takemikazuchi Mk 8".

The red cape he was wearing had also been named along that line of thought.

Inspired by an anti-hero from American comics, it was called the Necroplasmic Mantle.
(TL Note: in other words, Spawn's cape)

All of these were relic-class items. They were two tiers lower than Ainz's main gear, but he had considered that problems might arise from bringing items which were too strong, so he settled for equipment of this level.

Ainz worked his shoulders and savored the sensation of being free from his armor. Just then, Narberal asked a question:

"Speaking of which, how shall we deal with that annoying woman?"

"Ah, the one whose potion we broke? We don't need to split hairs with her. I'd be angry as well if someone broke something important to me."

Or at least, until his emotion-suppression kicked in. Ainz paused for a while, before continuing:

"...Well, probably. It's only natural for her to scold me for my carelessness."

"But all that was because a foolish human tried to provoke a Supreme Being. That man is the one who was to blame."

“Perhaps, but I was the one who threw that man. Therefore, I hope that you will be big-hearted and forgive her. What we should be doing in this city is becoming a part of this world, to increase the renown of Momon and Nabe. It would reflect badly on us if rumors spread that we could not even pay someone back the value of a single potion.”

Narberal nodded, although she could not quite accept what Ainz had said.

“Also, we should give her some face, since she’s technically our senior in this field.”

Ainz fiddled with the necklace he wore, though he kept his fingers away from the Nemean Lion.

If it’s just a simple metal plate, then it can be forged… although that should probably be something for the Guild to worry about.

That small copper plate was something like a set of dog tags. It was what allowed people to know the strength of an adventurer.

Copper. Iron. Silver. Gold. Platinum. Mithril. Orichalcum. Adamantite.

The latter metals were more valuable, which meant that adventurers of those ranks could select more difficult and more rewarding quests. This was part of the system the Guild had developed to keep adventurers from going to pointless deaths.

Ainz, a freshly-registered adventurer, was of the lowest class — copper. That woman was an iron-plate. Showing her a basic level of courtesy was the secret of successfully blending into society.

“However, I feel that such soft metals like adamantite are not worthy of you, Ainz-sama. Apoitakara, hihiirokane or other prismatic metals would be more fitting of yourself. These people in the Guild have no taste at all."

The metals Narberal had named were of the highest tiers in YGGDRASIL. Ainz turned a sharp look on her, and then said:

"Narberal, just to be safe, call me Momon while we are in this town."

"Understood, Momon-sama!"

"Do you need me to remind you again? Call me Momon."

"My, my deepest apologies, Momon-sa—n."

"...Momon-sa—n sounds kind of stupid, don't you think? Forget it, if it's hard for you to just call me Momon, then Momon-san will do. Got it?"

"I understand, Momon-san."

Once again, Narberal bowed deeply at the waist. Ainz tapped at his forehead with a finger.

She has no idea why I want her to call me Momon-san. She's kind of useless… forget it, there's nobody else I can use for now, so I'll forgive her.

"This is our plan for the future—"

"Yes!"

Narberal promptly genuflected before Ainz. It was the attitude of a vassal awaiting orders.

An annoyed Ainz had no idea how to proceed. Though he had locked the door after coming in, gossip would swiftly spread if people saw this scene.

Still… why doesn’t she understand the reason that I want her to call me Momon? I even explained it to her before coming to the inn...

With a tone of vague resignation, Ainz said:

“We are here to go undercover as adventurers in this city. This is because we have to collect information on adventurers — in other words, the strongest people in this world — though our emphasis will be on learning about YGGDRASIL players, like myself. Attaining higher ranks will allow us to take higher-ranked jobs, which will also allow us to collect more reliable and useful information. Therefore, our first objective is to become successful adventurers.”

After Narberal indicated that she understood, Ainz told her about the things she had to do.

“However, there are several problems at the moment.”

Ainz withdrew his small purse and opened it, then dumped its contents onto his hand. They were coins, and there were very few of them. There was no glint of gold among the coin.

“To begin with, we have no money.”

There were several reasons why Ainz had paid with a potion during the prior dispute. One of them was because he was not confident they could solve this problem with money. Saying that he had no money to pay would be laughable.

Ainz turned to the surprised Narberal, and explained:

“No, I should say that we do have a lot of money, but the currency we have is largely YGGDRASIL gold coins. Therefore, I would like to use those gold coins as a last resort.”

“Why is that? Haven’t we already confirmed that YGGDRASIL coins have monetary value?”

“Indeed, I learned from Carne Village that each YGGDRASIL gold coin is worth two of the local gold coins. However, if we use YGGDRASIL gold coins here, there’s no telling where they’ll end up. If things go bad, the news might spread beyond to others, and it’ll be a blatant advertisement to other YGGDRASIL players that we’re here. Therefore, we have to avoid that situation as long as we do not fully understand the situation.”

“Players… entities on the same level as yourself, Ainz-sama, and the villains who once attacked Nazarick.”

Ainz frowned as she referred to him as Ainz-sama, but he did not say anything, for the same reasons as just now.

“Indeed. They are people that cannot be taken lightly.”

His — Ainz Ooal Gown’s — level was the highest in YGGDRASIL, level 100. However, to players, being maximum level was hardly a rare thing. It could be said that most players were level 100.

Ainz considered himself to be among the upper-middle tier of the game’s players. This was because he was focused on taking levels in classes to better roleplay an undead magic caster, and neglected raising his own power. However, given the divine-class items he possessed, as well as his numerous cash items, he might be ranked in the middle of the top tier. Still, he could not take things easy. There was always a bigger fish, after all.

Thus, he had to avoid being found by other players, at any cost. There were many opponents Ainz could not defeat if he was drawn into battle.

In addition, there were many players who were human, and they would naturally protect other humans. If these players clashed with people like Albedo, who viewed humans as inferior lifeforms, the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick — or Ainz Ooal Gown — might very well count humanity as enemies. That was why he felt bringing Albedo along was dangerous.

Still, I didn't expect Narberal to feel the same way as well.

Ainz did not view humanity as an enemy, but he could kill human beings with no hesitation for the sake of his goals. Even so, he wanted to avoid conflict with other players.

“Well, that was a waste.”

“What was a waste?”

“I'm talking about how we lost Nigun so easily. He had a lot of information, but he perished under such simple questioning.”

There were roughly ten people still alive from the members of the Sunlight Scripture captured at Carne Village. The rest died during questioning and became media for Ainz to summon undead with his skills.

As he recalled the information tortured out of his captives, Ainz could not help but mutter:

“Most players would want to support the Slaine Theocracy…”

The Slaine Theocracy was a religious nation which venerated the Six Gods, who descended upon the world 600 years ago.

In the words of the Sunlight Scripture, the Slaine Theocracy fought to allow the weak human race to prosper, grow strong and defeat other species. Any player with any remaining humanity would approve of the Slaine Theocracy's aims.

Unlike his own world, where humanity stood atop all living creatures, in this world, humanity was one of the weakest species around.

Though they could build such an impressive city upon the plains, the fact that they had to live on the plains only highlighted humanity’s weakness.

That said, plains were also dangerous places. Firstly, there was no place to hide, so it was easy to be discovered by the enemy. Only weak species, who lacked darkvision, would choose to live in a place like this. They would have no safe spaces or living room if they chose otherwise.

There were species who were physically stronger and possessed more advanced civilizations than humans, but they were not in control of the continent. This was because they had ended up fighting the Eight Greed Kings, who dominated this land 500 years ago. Humanity was one of the few survivors of that war. If not, the human race would long since be extinct.

Any players in this world would want to help out humanity. That was why Ainz was on guard against players and kept his distance from the Slaine Theocracy.

“In any case, I plan to sell off the swords taken from the Slaine Theocracy troops pretending to be knights... but before that, we need to get a job.”

“Understood. Then, shall we visit the guild again tomorrow?”

“Indeed. Although I’d like to learn more by walking around this city, we should leave that for after we’ve earned some money.”

“I see. As a battle maid, I shall carry out your orders with all my strength.”

“Is that so. Then, I’ll be counting on you, Narberal.”

Ainz felt a warm glow of satisfaction as he watched Narberal bowing deeply. Then he cast a spell, and was wrapped in his armor and illusion once more.

“I will be inspecting our surroundings. You will stay here and wait for orders.”

“Please allow me to come with you!”

“No, I’m only looking around the neighborhood. I’ve heard of a large graveyard which I want to visit… and the other reason why you’re staying here is to ward off intruders. You must stay on your guard and never slack off. While I don’t think there’s any vulnerabilities in our defenses for the moment, this place might well be considered enemy territory, so you must never relax.”

“Understood.”

“I’ll leave the scheduled call-ins to you as well.”

♦♦♦

As Ainz left the room, Narberal sighed deeply.

Then she rubbed the corner of her eyes, and her eyes, previously filled with a keen expression, drooped powerlessly. Her face looked completely relaxed. Even her ponytail seemed to have lost its energy and hung limply down.

However, she still recalled her supreme master’s orders.

Though Narberal was dying to look around outside the room, she was a magic caster and had a lot of trouble replicating the feats of thieves. Therefore, she used the skills she was familiar with to make up the shortfall.

“[Rabbit’s Ear].”

A pair of adorable bunny ears grew from Narberal’s head as the spell was cast. The quivering ears immediately picked up all the sounds around her.

This was one of the three spells known as “Bunny Magic” to the players of Yggdrasil. The other two were [Rabbit’s Foot], which boosted luck and [Bunny Tail], which reduced monster aggro. Casting all three of these spells at once would change the appearance of a female character’s clothing, and so they were very popular. However, Narberal did not cast the other two because they were not needed.

Most of Narberal’s spells pertained to combat. This was one of the few exceptions.

After listening to the sounds around her, she made sure it was safe before casting the [Message] spell. As she expected, a pleasant female voice spoke within her head.

『Narberal Gamma, is something the matter?』

“Yes, this is the scheduled report.”

Narberal was speaking to the Guardian Overseer of the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick, Albedo.

She described every detail of the situation to Albedo, and finally she mentioned the news that Albedo was dying to hear:

“Ainz-sama mentioned you, Albedo-sama. He said that there was nobody else he could trust apart from you.”

『Kufu—!』

A strange cry of delight resounded within Narberal’s head.

『Good — very good — Narberal, you’re a good girl! Keep spreading that news for me! This is an order from Nazarick’s Guardian Overseer!』

Narberal wondered, “Is this really worth an order?” However, she realized that this might be a move in the struggle to better serve the Supreme One. Thus, such an order made perfect sense.

Just as Narberal was about to express her doubts, she heard Albedo’s excited voice once more.

『I’ll slowly decrease the distance between myself and Ainz-sama while Shalltear is out on business! Although the objective is hard to breach, as long as I keep up the pressure and gain a beachhead, I’ll be able to bring it down one day! On that glorious day, Shalltear will weep bitter tears of regret!』

Albedo’s cry of delight made Narberal furrow her brows. That excited voice was starting to annoy her.

With a voice that suggested she might burst into dance at any moment, Albedo continued babbling about what she would do next, and how things had to be, and then suddenly, she asked in a calm voice:

『Still, why are you helping me? Why did you choose me and not Shalltear? Could it be that you want something from me?』

“The answer is simple. If someone asked me whether Albedo-sama or Shalltear-sama was more suitable to sit beside Ainz-sama, I would definitely answer with your name, Albedo-sama.”

『Kufu—! Wonderful. I didn’t think you’d be able to see the future of Nazarick. I’m impressed.』

“Also, Yuri-neesama has a hard time dealing with Shalltear-sama.”

『Oh, Yuri Alpha. I see, so that’s how it is. Are the others on my side as well?』

The faces of the assistant leader Yuri Alpha as well as her other comrades appeared in Narberal’s mind.

“That is hard to tell. Lupusregina is with you, Albedo-sama, but Solution is on Shalltear-sama’s side. As for Entoma and Shizu, their allegiances are not yet known.”

『Can Solution be won over?』

“It would be very difficult, because her tastes are very similar to Shalltear-sama’s.”

『Oh, I see… what crude hobbies she has.』

Narberal agreed with Albedo’s words. She had no idea why Solution liked what she did, and she could not help but tilt her head in puzzlement.

Although all human beings were inferior lifeforms — with one exception — none of them had the hobby of tormenting humans. However, they would kill any humans who got in their way, even if doing so was tedious. That said, they would not go out of their way to kill them.

『Well, it can’t be helped. Then, move quickly and bring the other girls into my camp. Start with Entoma and Shizu.』

“That should be fine. Solution and Entoma both like eating humans, so if we bring Entoma to your side, Solution might end up becoming an ally as a result.”

『That’s right… I’ve got it. Then, onto something else… can you tell me in detail what my beloved Ainz-sama has been doing?』

“Yes, I understand.”

The scheduled communication with Albedo ended up being very heated — when Albedo heard Narberal and Ainz were sharing a room, she made strange noises and kicked up a fuss — to the point where she had to cast the same spell four times. Ainz was mildly annoyed when he returned, but that is a tale for another time.

Part 3

Sensing something like a color upon the wind, Britta sniffed several times, like a dog.

She was not mistaken — the air contained a greenish scent. This odor came from mysterious drugs and crushed plants. The smell told Britta that she was at her destination.

Britta continued forward, to a place where the smell was stronger than just now. Peering left and right, she walked on until she was in front of the largest house.

This house was different from the others around it, which were designed with a shop area in front and a work area in the back. It seemed to have been built from the ground up as a workshop.

From the sign that hung above the door and outside the place, she knew that she had arrived.

The bell mounted on top of the door rang surprisingly loudly as she pushed open the front door.

After she entered, she found herself in something that looked like a guest lounge. There were two facing benches in the middle of the room, cabinets of books on the walls, and ornamental plants in the corners of the room.

As she stepped into the lounge, a voice called out:

“Welcome!”

It was a male voice, though it sounded too young to belong to a man.

Looking around, she saw a teenage boy standing before her, dressed in a beat-up set of old work coveralls that were stained with juices from crushed plants.

His blond hair covered half his face, so it was hard to guess his age, but from his height and his voice, he should be in puberty.

Although he was a teenager, Britta could still guess his name. Apart from the fame of his grandmother, he had become one of the few notable people in E-Rantel by virtue of his innate talents.

“...Nfirea Bareare-san?”

“Yes, that’s me.”

The boy — Nfirea — nodded and asked:

“May I know what business you have here?”

“Ah, yes. Hang on a bit.”

Britta retrieved the folded slip of paper the innkeeper had passed her and gave it to the boy.

Upon receiving the piece of paper, Nfirea opened and read it.

“I see… so that’s what’s going on. Then, can I see the potion?”

Britta took out the potion and handed it to Nfirea, who brought it so close to himself that his hair covered it.

The atmosphere changed.

Nfirea swept his hair away, revealing a handsome face, which would surely break the hearts of many girls.

However, within that youthful face of his was a pair of steely eyes. It was hard to imagine that someone who spoke and acted like he did could have eyes like that. Those eyes sparkled with excitement. Nfirea shook the potion bottle several times and nodded.

“Forgive me, it’s not convenient to speak here. Could you follow me inside?”

Britta agreed, and under Nfirea’s guidance, she soon arrived at a messy room. Still, she thought that way because she lacked professional experience.

On the table were round-bottomed flasks, test tubes, distillation equipment, mortars, funnels, beakers, alcohol lamps, balances, a bizarre-looking pot and various other items. The shelves on the walls were filled with mysterious herb and mineral samples.

An acrid odor hung in the air. It seemed potentially dangerous to one’s body.

The person who was already within the room stared at the two people who had barged in.

She was a very old woman, and both her face and hands were heavily wrinkled. Her hair, which reached to her eyebrows, was pure white. Her work clothes were stained with even more green residue than Nfirea’s and she smelled heavily of grass.

Nfirea, who had just entered, called out to the old lady:

“Granny!”

“What is it, what is it, I can hear you even if you don’t shout. My ears are sharp, you know.”

Nfirea only had one grandmother, who was renowned as the greatest herbalist in this city, Lizzie Bareare.

“Come take a look at this.”

Lizzie accepted the potion Nfirea offered her. As she studied it, her gaze was so focused and keen that it unsettled Britta. She looked like a grizzled veteran of many battles.

In this, she was not wrong. Herbalists needed to use magic when making their potions and medicines, and the more famous the herbalist, the higher the tier of magic they could use. Therefore, the greatest herbalist of E-Rantel, Lizzie Bareare, was a much better combatant than Britta.

“This potion… did you bring it here? ...A legendary potion? No, could it be… God’s Blood? What on earth *is* this potion?”

“Eh?”

Britta’s eyes went wide, thinking *that’s my line*.

“Impossible… this potion. Where did you get it from? A ruin?”

“Eh? Ah, no, that…”

“What a shrinking violet you are. Just give me a straight answer — where did you get it from? Did you steal it? Hm?”

Britta’s shoulders shuddered in surprise. She had done nothing wrong, yet she felt like she was being rebuked.

“...Granny, don’t scare her.”

“...What are you saying, Nfirea? I didn’t scare her at all… right?”

No, you did. Britta wanted to say that, but instead she gulped and simply told Lizzie the full story about the potion:

“Ah, er, someone else gave it to me as payment.”

“...Hah?”

Lizzie’s eyes became even more stern.

“Wait a minute, Granny. Britta-san, could you tell me who gave it to you? And why was it given to you?”

With Nfirea’s help, Britta explained simply that she had received the potion from a mysterious man in full plate. As Lizzie heard it, more furrows sprouted on her wrinkled face.

“...Did you know that there are three kinds of potions?”

Without waiting for Britta’s reply, Lizzie continued:

“The first kind are potions made from herbs alone. Those potions act slowly, and all they can do is improve a person’s natural recovery. While they’re not very effective, they’re very cheap. The second kind of potions are made with herbs and magic. These potions take effect faster than the first kind, but they still need some time to work. Most adventurers use these potions to recover after a battle. The final kind of potion is made solely from magic. Essentially, one infuses a spell into an alchemical solution and it takes instant effect. These potions are functionally the same as a spell, but they are correspondingly more expensive. Then, which of these three kinds does that potion of yours belong too? I can’t see any traces of herbal residue, so it should be a pure-magic potion, but—”

Lizzie pulled out a potion bottle filled with a blue liquid and held it before Britta’s eyes.

“This is a basic healing potion. The colors are different, right? Recovery potions turn blue during their manufacture, but yours is red. In other words, the process by which that potion was made is completely different from the way normal potions are made. In other words, your potion is pretty rare, and for all we know it might end up revolutionizing modern potion-creation methods… well, you might not realise it for a while.”

After saying that, Lizzie cast a spell:

“[Appraisal Magic Item].”

“[Detect Enchant].”

After casting the two spells on the potion, a look of shock and anger appeared on Lizzie’s face.

“Kuku. Fuahaha!”

—Suddenly, crazed laughter echoed through the narrow room. Lizzie slowly raised her head, a terrifyingly mad smile on her face. Britta was so frightened by the sudden change in Lizzie that not only could she not speak, she could not even move.

“Kukuku! Is that what it is! Look closely at this potion, Nfirea! This is the perfected form of all potions! It’s right here! We — herbalists, alchemists, everyone in the business of making potions — have studied for so long and accumulated so much experience, but yet we have not been able to achieve this idealized form!”

Lizzie’s cheeks were red from her excitement and she was huffing and puffing. However, she maintained her death grip on the potion bottle as she brought it before Nfirea's eyes.

"Potions will deteriorate over time, am I right?!"

"Of course, that's common sense."

In stark contrast to Lizzie's excitement, Nfirea was calm. However, Britta could sense hints of anticipation within him.

She had no idea why they were so fired up about this. She keenly felt like she had been swept up into a storm that shook the heavens and the earth. To think she had brought a potion here that could put such an excited look on the face of E-Rantel's greatest herbalist!

"Pure magic potions are made from alchemical solutions. Those solutions are refined from a mineral base, so it's only natural that the quality of the solution will degrade over time. That's why you need to cast the spell [Preservation] on it."

Lizzie paused, and then spoke again.

"At least, until now."

Britta seemed to understand a little of what Lizzie was saying. She looked at the red solution, her eyes wide with surprise.

"This bottle! This potion! This bottle of potion! It doesn't deteriorate even without preservative magic! In other words, it's a perfect potion! Nobody's done anything like this until today! According to the ancient legends, the original healing potion was made from the blood of the gods."

Lizzie shook the bottle she was holding and the bright red liquid swirled within the glass.

"Of course, they're just legends. It used to be a joke between herbalists that the gods had blue blood.”

After another brief pause, Lizzie looked at the bottle of potion she was holding in her hand. It was trembling in her excitement.

“This potion might well be the true God’s Blood!”

Nfirea kept patting Lizzie’s back as she panted heavily. Britta was struck dumb by surprise. The silence between them was broken by Lizzie:

“...You must have come here to learn about this potion’s effects, right? This potion is around the level of a 2nd-tier healing spell. Not counting added value from its rarity, it would fetch around 8 gold pieces. That said, once you factor that extra value in, the price is enough that people would murder you for it.”

Britta’s body trembled uncontrollably.

To an iron-plate adventurer like Britta, the potion’s base value alone was already very high, to say nothing of the added value. Lizzie had a gleaming edge in her eye, and she looked like she was looking for any opportunity to take it from her.

Even so, Britta had her doubts. Why would that man in full plate armor give her that potion so easily? What sort of man hid under that armor?

Just as countless doubts appeared in her heart, Lizzie asked:

“How about selling it to me? I’ll give you a good price for it. How about 32 gold pieces?”

Britta’s eyes went even wider.

The price Lizzie had just quoted was a staggering sum. Frugally used, it was enough for a family of three to live on for three years.

Britta was confused. She knew the potion was incredibly valuable. Then, was selling it for 32 gold pieces the right thing to do? It seemed unlikely that she would ever be able to lay her hands on another potion like this again.

But if she refused, would she make it back alive?

After seeing Britta's hesitant face, Lizzie shook her head and proposed another deal—

Part 4

The next morning, Ainz — also known as Momon — opened the guild's doors once more.

The first thing he saw as he entered the room was the counter, where three of the guild's receptionists greeted the adventurers with smiles on their faces. There were warriors in full plate armor, nimble fellows in light armor and bearing bows, people in priest's garb and adorned with all manner of holy symbols, as well as robed arcane magic casters with their staves.

On the left was a large door, and on the right was a notice board. There were several pieces of parchment upon it which he had not seen yesterday. Several adventurers were chatting in front of it.

Annoyed by that sight and the many sticking-out pieces of parchment, Ainz moved forward to the counter.

The eyes of everyone present focused on the copper plate around Ainz's neck, and he could feel those eyes sizing him up from head to toe. It was just like yesterday at the inn.

Ainz was surveying the adventurers in turn. They wore gold and silver plates on their necklaces, with no copper plates. Feeling vaguely out of place, Ainz advanced to the counter.

A group of adventurers had just departed, freeing up one of the counters. He stepped forward and said:

"Pardon me, but I'm looking for work."

"Then, please select a piece of parchment from over there and bring it here."

Ainz nodded in silence, feeling as though his nonexistent sweat glands were now recovering some of their function. He arrived before the notice boards, looked across all of them, and then nodded.

Yup, I can’t read any of them.

One of the laws in this world was that spoken language was automatically translated, but written text was not.

The receptionists walked him through everything the last time he came to the Adventurer’s Guild, so he had assumed they would do the same this time too. How naive.

He wanted to scream “Ahhhh” and roll around on the ground, and then his emotions suddenly calmed down. Grateful for this property of his new body, Ainz frantically racked his brains.

While the literacy rate here was not high, it would be shameful if his inability to read was discovered by others. They might even look down on him.

The translation item that Ainz possessed was now in the hands of Sebas. During YGGDRASIL he had ignored spells of that sort and had not learned them. After all, he had scrolls, which could substitute for learning those spells.

He cursed himself for a fool, for coming out without making preparations despite knowing that he could not read the language.

Still, there was no point crying over spilt milk. Regret would not help him here.

Narberal could not read the words either, so was of no use.

Negative thoughts rose up in his mind, but as the ruler of Nazarick, he could not do anything embarrassing.

After gathering his resolve, Ainz ripped off a piece of parchment, and strode back to the counter.

“I’d like to take this job.”

Confusion came over the counter girl’s face as she looked at the parchment before her eyes. Then, she smiled bitterly and replied:

“I’m very sorry, but this job is only for mithril-plate adventurers…”

“I know. That’s why I took it.”

The calm, unwavering tone in Ainz’s voice evoked doubt in the counter girl’s eyes.

“Er, about that…”

“I would like to take this job.”

“Eh? Ah, but, even if you ask, according to the rules…”

“They’re worthless rules. I’m fed up with having to keep proving myself with easy, pathetic jobs like this before my rank-up examinations.”

“If you fail the job, many people will lose their lives.”

The receptionist’s firm voice seemed to encompass the silent opinions of the countless people who had worked hard to qualify themselves by the guild’s rankings.

“Hmph.”

Ainz’s snort drew hostility from the counter girl and the surrounding adventurers. Ainz felt that their attitude was only to be expected. After all, he was a clueless newcomer who was sneering at the rules by which they abided.

As an undead being, Ainz felt nothing, but the remnants of Suzuki

Satoru's salaryman sensibilities made Ainz want to apologize to everyone around him.

Suzuki Satoru hated those people who rejected other' opinions without offering solutions of their own, and crappy customers who knew nothing.

Right now, Ainz was part of the latter group, and he wanted to give himself a good punch.

However, Ainz could not back down easily. He wanted to, but he could still deal with a situation of this level. Therefore, Ainz pulled out his trump card.

"The person behind me is my companion, Nabe. She is a magician of the 3rd tier."

The air shuddered with a collective gasp, and everyone looked at Narberal in surprise. In this world, 3rd-tier spells were the highest which most magic casters could reach.

Is he for real? The eyes of the surrounding people shifted to Ainz's stylish full plate armor, dubious of his claim.

Adventurers wore equipment which matched their abilities. The stronger they were, the better the gear they outfitted themselves with. Ainz's armor was very eye-catching and he travelled with a woman like Nabe, both of which were very persuasive.

Noticing the changes around him, Ainz cheered inside his heart, and decided to strike while the iron was hot:

"I, personally, am a warrior of comparable strength to Nabe. I am very sure that a job like that would be a trivial task for me."

The receptionist and the other adventurers were not as surprised in comparison to just now. They seemed to be looking at Ainz with different eyes.

“We did not become adventurers to do jobs for a few pieces of copper. I wish to take on a higher-ranked job. If you wish to see our strength, I will be more than glad to show it to you. Therefore, can we take this job?”

The hostility towards them was fading rapidly, and there were whispers of “Indeed, that’s right” and “No wonder”. After all, the rough men called adventurers valued strength, and they understood what Ainz was trying to say.

However, the counter girl was a different matter.

“...I am very sorry, but we cannot let you take this job due to the rules.”

The receptionist lowered her head in apology, and Ainz took a victory pose in his heart.

“Then it can’t be helped… it seems I’ve put you in a difficult position,” Ainz replied as he nodded in apology.

“Then, help me pick the most challenging copper-plate job, then. There should be others besides the ones on the noticeboard, right?”

“Ah, there are, I know.”

The receptionist stood up, and just as Ainz was about to cry tears of joy at his absolute victory, a man’s voice reached his ears.

“How about helping us with our work, then?”

“What?”

He had reflexively responded in a low, threatening tone. Ainz looked over, but all saw was a four-man adventurer team, their silver plates glittering on their necklaces.

Ainz grumbled internally — *After all the effort to misdirect them* — and turned to face those people.

“The job in question… it’s a worthwhile assignment… right?”

“Mm — well, I feel it’s worthwhile.”

The person who responded was a man who looked like the team’s leader. He wore some sort of banded armor — strips of metal woven together with metal threads over a leather or chain backing — and carried himself like a warrior.

Should he join this man’s team and work with them? Of course, he could decide after hearing them out, but then there was no telling if the receptionist girl would help them pick a job after he spoke with them. However, if he took their job, there would be a chance to build relations with them and obtain useful information.

Several seconds passed.

Ainz slowly nodded:

“Worthwhile jobs are exactly what I seek. Then, let us work together. However, I would like to ask what sort of job it is.”

After hearing his response, the men asked the receptionist to prepare a room for them.

It looked like a meeting room, with a wooden table lined with chairs in the middle. The men streamed in and sat down.

“Please have a seat.”

Ainz did as he was told, and Narberal silently took a place beside him.

The men were all quite young, probably under 20, but there was no childishness in them and they possessed a maturity which did not match their ages. Although they seemed to have seated themselves randomly around the table, judging by their distance and positioning, they could draw their weapons at any time.

This unconscious display must have been a habit born from countless close encounters with death.

“Before we begin discussing the job, let us introduce ourselves.”

The speaker was the man who looked like a warrior.

He had the typical blond hair and blue eyes of the Kingdom, and while there were no other distinguishing features on him, he looked quite handsome.

“I’m the leader of the ‘Swords of Darkness’, Peter Mauk. That fellow over there is the eyes and ears of our team, the ranger Lukrut Volve.”

A leather-armored blond man nodded in acknowledgement, and his brown eyes seemed to have a spark of delight in them. He was slender and long-limbed, kind of like a spider, but his lean torso was wiry and muscular.

“Next is our magic caster and the brains of our group, Ninya, The Spellcaster.”

“Pleased to meet you.”

He was probably the youngest person in the group, with dark brown hair and blue eyes. Though he was an adult, the smile on his face looked too youthful.

Unlike the tanned skin of the group's other members, his skin was pale, and his face was the prettiest of the group's. It was more of an androgynous beauty than any masculine concept of attractiveness. His voice was higher-pitched than the others.

However, the smile on his face was like a mask, though it was not entirely fake.

While the others all wore armor, he wore a leather robe. However, Ainz could see that beneath the table he had various strange items in his belt, including oddly-shaped bottles and peculiar wooden objects and so on.

Judging from the term spellcaster, he was probably a magic caster of the arcane variety, like Ainz.

"...But Peter, can you not use that embarrassing nickname?"

"Eh? But it's a good one."

"You have a nickname?" Ainz asked, with no idea what was going on. Lukrut explained:

"He's a talent holder, and a genius magic caster."

"Oh…" Ainz murmured: they had tortured three of the Sunlight Scripture members to death to get that information, and now there was a live example in front of him. Ainz was delighted.

However, Narberal did not understand and simply snorted derisively. Ainz sighed in relief after he realized that none of them had heard it. He was slightly mad because his incompetent subordinate was doing odd things like this during a negotiation, but getting into an argument here would not be productive either, so Ainz quickly calmed himself down.

“It’s nothing much, it’s just that I happened to have a talent pertaining to that field…”

“Oh…”

Ainz was even more interested, and he leaned forward, straining to listen.

Much like martial arts, talents were abilities that did not exist in YGGDRASIL but which were unique to this world. About one in every 200 people was born with a talent. While talent-holders were not rare, the abilities themselves varied greatly in potency and type.

For instance, there were talents like being able to predict tomorrow’s weather with 70% accuracy, the ability to strengthen summoned monsters, hastening the harvest by several days, using the magic of the dragons which once ruled this world, and so on.

However, all of these were inborn abilities, which could not be chosen or changed. It was quite common to encounter situations where these abilities could not be applied. If someone was born with a talent that could improve the destructive power of their magic, but they never had the chance to become a magic caster, then their talent would be useless.

There were very few people who could make good use of their talents. There were almost no talents which could dictate the course of one’s entire life, apart from a few exceptionally powerful talents..

The best proof of that statement was Gazef Stronoff, who was a warrior without a talent.

However, people with combat-applicable talents tended to go into the adventuring profession. Therefore, talent-holders were a common sight among adventurers. The person before him was one of those lucky few who could fully utilize his talent.

“I think his talent had something to do with being suited to studying magic, and he only took four years to learn what should have taken eight years. I’m not a magic caster, so I’m not sure how great that is.”

Ainz was a magic caster as well. Those words made him curious, and awoke a collector’s desire within him. This was an ability which the Great Underground Tomb of Nazarick did not possess, and which could strengthen the organization. If he could gain control of that ability, it might be worth making enemies of everyone here.

Shrinking the time it took to learn an ability like this should have been the province of a Super-tier spell, [Wish Upon A Star].

The two of them continued talking, without realizing that Ainz was watching them under his helmet, like a tiger ready to pounce on its prey.

“...I’m really lucky that I was born with this ability, because it allowed me to take a step closer to my dream. Without this power, I would have ended my days as a lowly peasant.”

Ninya’s muttering was gloomy and solemn. As though to sweep away the grim air hanging over the room, Peter continued in a completely different tone:

“Well, no matter what, you’re still a famous talent-holder in this city.”

“Still, there’s people more famous than me.”

“The leader of Blue Rose?”

“That person’s famous too, but I was talking about someone within this city.”

“You mean, Bareare-shi?!” shouted the last person, who had not yet been introduced yet. Ainz was curious about the name and asked:

“...And what sort of talent does that person have?”

A look of surprise came over all four of them. It would seem this was common knowledge.

Ainz had asked that question because he was curious and wanted to acquire an ability which could strengthen Nazarick. Therefore, in response to the regret he felt over his carelessness, he told himself that there had to be some way to recover from a mistake like this.

However, before Ainz could explain, the other side came to a conclusion of their own:

“I see, the reason why we don’t know you at all despite that stylish full plate and your beautiful companion is because you’re not from around here, am I right?”

Ainz nodded at this heaven-sent mercy of a question.

“Indeed, that is correct. The truth is, we only arrived here yesterday.”

“Oh, so you wouldn’t know, then? He’s a famous person in this town, but he’s probably not that famous that distant cities would know about him, huh?”

“Yes, I’ve never heard of him before. If you don’t mind, could you tell me about him?”

“His name is Nfirea Bareare, the grandson of a famous herbalist. His talent allows him to use any magic item. Not only can he use scrolls of a different spellcasting system from himself, he can even use items made by the non-human races. Even items restricted to those of royal blood shouldn't be a problem either."

"...oh."

Ainz tried his best not to let them hear the awe in his voice.

How much could his talent do? Could he use the Staff of Ainz Ooal Gown — which only the guildmaster could use — as well as World-Class Items? Or did it have limits?

He was someone to be wary of, but he could be very useful as well.

Narberal seemed to feel the same way. She brought her mouth close to where Ainz's ears would be under the helmet and whispered:

"I think that person is dangerous."

"...I know. Coming to this city was the right decision."

"Momon-san, is something the matter?"

"Oh, no, it's fine, don't worry. Speaking of which, could you tell me about your last friend?"

"Yes. He's a druid — Dyne Woodwonder. He uses healing spells and magic that controls nature, and he's well versed in herbal lore. Let him know if there's anything wrong with your body; he has medicine that's good for stomach pains."

"Pleased to meet you!" came the greeting from the burly, barbaric-looking man with a full, bushy beard. However, he seemed younger than how Ainz appeared.

There was a very faint smell of grass from him, which came from the cloth pouch tied to his waist.

“Then, it’s time for us to introduce ourselves. She is Nabe, I am Momon. Pleased to meet you.”

“Pleased to meet you.”

“Wonderful, I hope we’ll get along. Then, Momon-san, just address me by my first name. Right, while it feels a little wrong to get to business so abruptly, we should probably start discussing the job. As for that, the truth is what we’re asking you for doesn’t really qualify as work.”

“That means…”

Upon hearing Ainz’s confusion, Peter extended his hand to halt him, with the intention of delaying the question for a later date.

“This job is to hunt the monsters that appear around the town.”

“Clearing out monsters, huh…?”

That was enough to count as work. Or was there some special adventurer reason which made him say that it did not qualify? Ainz wanted to ask about that, but if this was common knowledge, asking that question might make him appear clueless, which was bad. Therefore, he tried asking a safe question instead.

“What sorts of monsters will we be exterminating?”

“Ah, we’re not exterminating monsters. After hunting monsters, the city council will pay us a reward based on their strength. What do they call it where you come from, Momon-san?”

So that was it.

Ainz understood. When Peter said that this did not qualify as work, in Yggdrasil terms, it was more like killing spawned monsters and taking the items they dropped.

“This is something we have to do to make a living,” said the druid — Dyne Woodwonder — in his deep baritone.

Following that, Lukrut spoke up as well.

“For us, it’s making a living, but what we do also reduces the danger to the surrounding people. The traders can come and go in peace and the country can collect its taxes. All in all, it’s a way to earn money without anyone losing out.”

“Nowadays, most countries with guilds do this, but five years ago, this sort of thing was nonexistent. It’s quite surprising.”

Everyone in the team nodded as Ninya spoke. They began chatting amongst themselves, leaving no openings for Ainz to cut in. Still, it would be odd to know absolutely nothing about this country, so Ainz decided to shut up and listen to what they said.

“It’s all thanks to the Golden Princess, long may she live.”

“She proposed a policy through that would waive taxes on adventurers, although it never got passed.”

“Oh, to think she paid so much attention to adventurers.”

“Indeed. Some rulers would treat armed organizations who were not loyal to the country as enemies. Even the Empire isn’t so generous.”

“That princess sure is brilliant, coming out with all these great proposals… although almost all of them were shot down.”

"I want to marry a beautiful girl like that~"

"Then, shouldn't you work on getting ennobled?"

"Ah—no way, no way, I couldn't live a stifled life like that."

"I think being a noble's not bad. After all, the Kingdom pretty much allows a noble to trample the peasants and do as they please."

There was a strong undercurrent of mockery hidden beneath Ninya's words. Ainz furrowed his nonexistent brows within his helmet, but Narberal remained still, a nonchalant look on her face. Lukrut replied in a jovial tone:

"Uwah~ that tongue of yours is still so vicious. You really hate nobles, don't you?"

"I know that some nobles are honorable, but my big sister was taken away by that big. I can't *not* hate nobles."

"...We're getting sidetracked here! We shouldn't be talking about this sort of thing in front of our comrades, Momon-shi and Miss Nabe."

After Dyne tried to get everyone back on track, Peter coughed in an incredibly fake manner before continuing:

"And so, we'll be searching for monsters in the nearby region. We're close to a developed region, so the monsters shouldn't be too strong. Does that displease you, Momon-san?"

Peter spread a piece of parchment on the table. It looked to be a map of the surrounding region. The map showed villages, forests, rivers, and so on.

"Basically, we'll be heading south and looking around this area."

His finger moved from the center of the parchment to the vicinity of the southern forest.

“We’ll be hunting monsters in the forest bordering the Slaine Theocracy. THe only creatures who can hit the back line are goblins with magic items that grant flight.”

“However, we won’t get much for killing such weak monsters.”

Ainz had his doubts about this group’s easygoing attitude.

From what Ainz knew, there were many kinds of named goblins in Yggdrasil, and their levels ranged from 1 to 50. Since individual goblins could vary widely in power, one could not lump the goblins into one big group. A moment’s carelessness could lead to dire consequences.

Did their relaxed attitudes mean that they were confident of not encountering high-level goblins, or did it mean that this world’s goblins were simply that weak?

“...What if a powerful goblin shows up?”

“While it’s true that powerful goblins exist, they won’t show up in the forest we’re heading towards, because these goblins are usually tribal leaders. They won’t mobilize their entire tribes just for us.”

“The goblins know about humanity’s area of influence, so they’re fully aware of the retaliation that’ll be headed that way if they launch a large-scale attack. It’s especially true when it comes to the stronger goblins, since they tend to be the higher-ranked and more intelligent members of their species.”

“Plus, Nabe-san can use 3rd-tier magic. So it should be fine even if we encounter high-level goblins, right?”

“I see. However, I’d like to remind you that there are goblins who can use 3rd-tier magic. Just for my reference, could you tell me about the monsters we might encounter?”

The Swords of Darkness turned in unison to look at Ninya. Picking up on their thoughts, Ninya began explaining with a teacherly look on his face.

“We’re likely to encounter goblins and the wolves they raise. As for other monsters, there haven’t been any strong ones sighted around this area. The most dangerous monsters we might encounter on the plains are probably ogres.”

“We won’t be entering the forest?”

“Yes, because the forest is very dangerous. We can still deal with things like Jumping Leeches and Giant Beetles, but the Hanging Spiders which spit webs at you from the trees and the Forest Worms which maul you from the ground with their huge jaws are harder to handle.”

No wonder.

Ainz nodded in acknowledgement. So their aim was to hunt the monsters from the forest which made their way onto the plains.

“That’s how it is, Momon-san. How about it? Want to lend us a hand?”

“...Mm. Then, I’ll be in your care… although before that, could you tell me about the pay for this?”

“Ah, yes, that’s right, the payment is very important. Basically, since Momon-san’s team and our team are working together, the plan is to split it evenly.”

“Going by the numbers in our teams, it seems awfully generous.”

“However, when the monsters appear, I hope you and Nabe-san will take half of them as well. We can only use spells of up to the 2nd tier. So when we factor your abilities in, that division of the money seems quite logical.”

Ainz pretended to think for a while before nodding his head in agreement.

“I have no problems with that arrangement. Then, let us fight shoulder to shoulder. Also, since we’re working together, I guess I should let everyone see my true face.”

With that, Momonga removed his helmet. The four people before him seemed quite surprised by what they saw.

“...Black eyes and hair like Nabe-san, so he shouldn’t have been born in this area. I’ve heard that in the south, people like Momon-san are commonplace… did you come from that region?”

“Yes. We have come here from a faraway land.”

He’s older than I thought, he’s already an uncle.

Hey, that’s rude.

A warrior on par with a magic caster of the 3rd tier should be around that age.

Miss Nabe’s pretty amazing too.

Ainz’s keen ears picked up their whispered words, with the exception of Peter’s.

Being called an uncle made Ainz feel uncomfortable, but it probably couldn’t be helped that he was an uncle in the eyes of these youngsters. If one was an adult by the age of 16, then Ainz was definitely an uncle to them.

“I’ll be covering my face up after showing it to you. There might be trouble if other people know I’m a foreigner.”

With that, Ainz put his helmet back on again. After that, he smiled in satisfaction under his helmet. This was because Ainz had enchanted himself with an illusion — although it was a low-grade type, which would be seen through if touched — just in case.

“Since we’ll be hunting together, it would probably be good to get questions out of the way at this point. Do you have anything to ask me?”

“Me!”

A hand shot up toward the ceiling after Ainz asked his question. That hand belonged to Lukrut.

After making sure that nobody else was asking a question other than himself, Lukrut cheerfully asked Narberal:

“What kind of relationship do you two have!”

The room was filled with silence.

Ainz had no idea what Lukrut meant by that question. However, Peter and his people had picked up on Lukrut’s intentions.

“...We are companions.”

After Ainz’s answer, Lukrut’s next few words threw the room into an uproar.

“I’ve fallen for you! It’s love at first sight! Please go out with me!”

Everyone turned to look at Lukrut. After realising that Lukrut’s words were not a joke to deepen their friendship, Ainz shifted his gaze to Narberal. As the center of attention, Narberal took a deep breath before replying:

“Silence, inferior lifeform (slug). Learn your place before speaking again, or should I rip your tongue out of your head.”

The silence was even more deafening than before.

“Ah, no…”

Ainz made to lighten the mood, but Lukrut stole a march on him and said: “Thank you for the firm rejection! Then, let’s start as friends!”

“Die, inferior lifeform (maggot). How could I possibly be friends with you? Or do you want me to gouge out your eyeballs with a spoon?”

After turning away from the feuding pair, Ainz and Peter bowed to each other in apology.

“...My comrade has made trouble for you.”

“No, I should be the one apologizing.”

“We’ll call it quits, then. Is that all right?”

Peter looked around before speaking, though he kept his eyes from the grinning Lukrut and the cold-eyed Narberal.

“Then, Momon-san. If you’re ready, then let’s move out. We’re already prepared.”

After hearing the word “ready”, Ainz suddenly thought of something.

They had already purchased the minimum required gear from the innkeeper. Although Ainz and Narberal did not need to waste space on food and drinks, it would be weird if they did not eat or drink anything, so they had some ready just in case.

“All right, once we distribute the rations, we can set out right away.”

“Are rations the only thing you need to prepare? If you’re not going to buy them from a specialist shop, why not get some dry rations from the counter? They’ll prepare them for you right away.”

“Is that so? That’s good to hear. We can finish our preparations right away.”

“Then, let’s go.”

Everyone rose and left the room.

♦♦♦

After returning to the guild lobby, there were more adventurers than before, and there were several teams standing near the parchment-covered noticeboard. However, everyone’s attention seemed focused on a certain teenager.

The blond-haired teenager was talking to one of the counter girls, and the other two receptionists were leaning in to eavesdrop on their conversation. If things had been busy when Ainz came in, the current situation was now the exact opposite.

The counter girl’s face — no, her mouth was in an O shape. It was a look of surprise. And the person she was looking at was none other than Ainz himself.

What’s going on here?

Just as doubt started welling up inside Ainz, the counter girl approached and said:

“There is a job here asking for you by name.”

Those words changed the air in the room instantly. Ainz could feel many curious eyes staring unreservedly at him.

The Swords of Darkness were similarly shocked.

Narberal shifted briefly at the unpleasant change in the room’s atmosphere. This was to make it easier to act during the critical early stages of a battle.

Ainz could not help but feel worried by this.

This is bad, Narberal’s movements are bad. Judging by the way Narberal stood beside him, she must have thought that something strange was about to happen and had taken up a defensive posture to protect Ainz. However, it was an action completely unfitting for a situation like this. Normal people would not do such a thing under these circumstances.

Granted, protecting Ainz was her top priority, but her movements were far too thoughtless.

You idiot. Albedo’s the same way too. What the hell are the both of you thinking? No… it’s more like they didn’t think at all. They feel like they can crush humans like insects because they look down on them.

While that sort of attitude could not be helped from NPCs of a guild composed of heteromorphic beings (Ainz Ooal Gown) there was a time and place for that sort of thing.

An annoyed Ainz wanted to ask his past comrades, “Why are all your NPCs like this?” He did not care what kind of backstory they had, but they needed to have basic social skills, as well as the ability to take note of the time, place, situation, and respond accordingly.

He did not have time to scold Narberal now. If someone discovered that Narberal was in battle mode, who knew what sort of trouble they might get into.

Ainz immediately karate-chopped Narberal on the head. Although he did not use his full strength, he was still wearing his Jarngreipr. Narberal looked back at Ainz with tear-filled eyes, a look of surprise and confusion on her face, as though Ainz had grievously wounded her with that strike. However, Ainz paid her no heed and asked the counter girl:

“And who is this person who has asked for me by name?”

The moment those words cleared his mouth, Ainz cursed himself. Who else could it be but the boy in front of him?

“That would be Nfirea Bareare-san.”

I just heard that name — as Ainz thought this, the boy approached him.

“Pleased to meet you. I was the one who put out that job.”

The boy nodded slightly, and Ainz returned the gesture.

“Actually, this request—”

Before the boy could finish speaking, Ainz raised his hand to interrupt:

“My deepest apologies, but I’ve already made an agreement with someone else for a job, so I cannot accept your request right away.”

The air in the room seemed to shudder as he said this. The reaction of the Swords of Darkness was more intense than Ainz's own:

"Momon-san! He asked for you by name!"

Peter's response filled Ainz with doubt. Was a personal request something to be surprised about? However—

"That may be so, but should I not carry out the job I've been requested to do earlier?"

Ainz's decision seemed to have been the right one. Some of the adventurers around him were nodding in approval. Just then, he had a flash of inspiration:

"However… our job is hardly a request. If we don't meet any monsters, there won't be any pay to speak of…"

Peter's words to Ainz trailed off, and he sounded reluctant to speak them.

Being hired by the boy with the famous grandmother was a far cry from wandering around the place trying to kill monsters. That was why Peter sounded like he wanted to give up on the job.

With that conclusion in mind, Ainz gently said:

"...Then how about this, Peter-san. Bareare-san has not told me about the job's details, payment, timeframe and so on. I will hear him out and make my decision then."

"I'm alright with that, of course. Though I'd like to finish it quickly, it can wait a day or two."

"Then, please allow my friends from Swords of Darkness to be present during the job briefing… no, I should say, if the negotiations fall through, I would like the privilege of carrying out my previous task first.”

“Eh? Momon-san, is it all right for us to come with you?”

“Of course. I hope you will be party to the discussion and provide your opinions.”

After the Swords of Darkness gave their approval, Ainz and company returned to the room from just now.

He felt very busy.

Once more, Ainz smiled bitterly and took his seat from just now. Narberal sat beside him, while the boy was one seat away from them. The Swords of Darkness went back to their previous places.

The first to speak among them was, of course, the boy:

“The receptionist mentioned it earlier, but I think it would be best if I introduced myself. I am Nfirea Bareare, and I work as a herbalist in this city. As for the details of the job, I will soon be heading into the nearby forest as planned. Since everyone knows the forest is dangerous, I was hoping that you could be my guardians, as well as helping to harvest herbs if possible.”

“Bodyguarding, huh. I see.”

Ainz nodded calmly. He had the feeling that this job would be a troublesome one.

Ainz knew he was powerful, and he could probably exterminate any attacking monster when working with Narberal. However, he was not as confident when it came to carrying out an escort mission. This was because Ainz and Narberal were both magic casters, and lacked the specialized magic and skills needed to become shields for other people.

“Compared to the usual amount, the payment will be—”

“—Please hold on a moment. The task of bodyguarding suits you well. Then, Peter-san, would you like me to take you on instead?”

“Eh?”

“If it’s a job that involves bodyguarding and harvesting herbs, don’t you think we’d be more effective with Lukrut-san the ranger and Dyne-san the druid?”

“Oh! Good eye, Momon-shi. As a druid, I can show my true ability in the forest, perhaps even more so than Lukrut the ranger.”

Dyne’s baritone seemed to carry an undercurrent of pride. Lukrut was not happy and said:

“Dyne-*san*, you really went and said it, huh.”

“It’s an undeniable truth, given the abilities of druids! And don’t forget that I’m trained in herbalism too!”

“Hmph — Peter, I’m fine too. I’ll show you who’s the better of us, between Druid-san and myself.”

“I’ll take that to be agreement, then. If we see any monsters on the way, we’ll kill them and claim the reward when we get back to town. As for Bareare-san’s payment, what if we divided it equally, Peter-san?”

“If you’re fine with it, then I have no objections, Momon-san.”

“Bareare-san, sorry for the wait. If it’s alright with you, could you permit everyone here to accept the job that you just offered?”

“I don’t mind that. Then, I’ll be counting on all of you. Ah, you can just call me Nfirea.”

Ainz and the others began introducing themselves to Nfirea. Although Narberal lashed Lukrut with her sharptongue, they managed to successfully complete their self-introductions.

“Then, what I’ve done in the past is to proceed to Carne Village to set up a base of operations before venturing into the forest.The amount of time we’ll spend depends on the herbs that we can gather, but it will be three days at the latest. In the past, it’s been a couple of days on average.”

“Will we be walking there?”

“Ah, yes. There will be a horse cart, but it’ll be full of pots and bottles for gathering herbs, so there’s not much room for you to ride.”

“Can we replenish our rations in Carne Village?”

“Water should be fine, but food might be a problem, because Carne Village isn’t very big.”

The Swords of Darkness began discussing the preparations for the journey, as well as asking Nfirea several questions. As Ainz saw this, he decided to speak up as well:

“May I ask a few questions?”

After seeing Nfirea smile and nod in reply, Ainz began with the first question.

“Why me? I’ve only arrived in this city by carriage recently, and as such I have no friends here, nor am I renowned in this area. That being the case, why did you ask for me? In addition, you mentioned that you've done this in the past, which implies that in the past you've hired other adventurers. How about them?"

Ainz's gaze was keen under his helmet.

He did not know why the boy had called him out. If he had been exposed, then he would need to change his disguise and his approach to things.

Ainz studied Nfirea closely — though he could not see his eyes, due to the hair concealing them — but he could not tell what the boy truly wanted.

Could it be that he was overthinking this? Just as Ainz was beginning to get suspicious, Nfirea replied:

"Ah, the adventurers I hired in the past have all left E-Rantel for another city. That's why I was looking for new adventurers. Also, actually… I heard about what happened in the inn from one of its guests."

"What happened in the inn?"

"Yes, I heard that someone effortlessly threw an adventurer one rank higher than himself..."

"I see…"

Ainz had planned to use a show of strength to increase his renown. Had this boy taken the bait? Once more, as suspicion welled up in Ainz, Nfirea smiled and pointed to the plate on Ainz's breastplate.

"Plus, copper-ranked adventurers are cheaper, right? Hopefully we'll get along for a while yet."

“Haha, I do hope so.”

Ainz understood how it was like to hire an untested rookie. He slowly felt himself lowering his guard, but there was one thing that worried him. If that really happened —

As Ainz thought about this, the other were asking questions one by one, which Nfirea took in stride. After there were no more questions, Nfirea announced:

“Then, let’s move out once we’re ready!”

Part 5

In the dead of night, a hooded person entered the giant graveyard of E-Rantel, with steps that made it seem as though it were gliding across the ground.

The person’s hooded, jet-black cape and the way its waist and shoulders did not move up and down as it advanced was quite peculiar, resembling a ghost when viewed from afar.

The figure deftly avoided the magical illumination of the tomb and proceeded ever inward.

Before long, the figure arrived at a mausoleum, and shed its hood.

The figure was a young woman of around 20, in the flower of her youth.

She had a pretty face, and she was cute in the way of a kitten or other small animal. Still, while she looked adorable, there was a carnivore’s predatory nature hidden under that face of hers.

“I’m here~”

As she spoke in playful tones, the girl ran her fingers through her short blonde hair and pushed open the stone doors to the mausoleum. The noises of clattering metal came from under her cloak, like the sound of chain mail.

Once inside the mausoleum, all the slabs for corpses were empty. The grave goods for the deceased had already been taken away.

Perhaps it was the scent of all the incense absorbed by the stone, but a fragrant smell tickled the girl’s nose.

The girl furrowed her brows, then headed steadily inwards.

“Hm hm hm — hm~”

The girl pressed on an unobtrusive little carving as she hummed. As the carving moved, there was a click as something made contact with something else. A moment later, the sound of grinding came forth. The slabs slowly moved aside, and a path leading downstairs appeared.

“I’m coming in~”

With those sing-song words, the girl descended the staircase. It curved halfway, and led to a wide open space beneath the earth.

Although the walls and floor were made of mud, it looked like it had been worked, so it would probably not collapse so easily. The air was relatively clean; the airflow to this place was good, which kept the air in here fresh.

However, this was not part of the graveyard; it was something far more malevolent in nature.

Menacing tapestries hung on the walls, with several crimson candles made from fresh blood below it. They gave off a pale radiance, as well as a smell of burning blood.

The flickering flames generated countless shadows, and there were several holes here, big enough for people to pass through. The unique corpse-stench of low-tier undead wafted out from those holes.

The girl looked around, and her eyes stopped on a certain place.

“Ah~ creepy guy who’s hiding in a corner, you’ve got a guest~”

The man watching his surroundings from his hiding place in the dark corners of the room heard those words, and his shoulders trembled.

“Hi~ I’m here to meet Khazi-chan who’s supposed to be here, is he~?”

The man seemed a little lost as to what to do, and as he heard the sound of footsteps again, his shoulders shook once more.

“It’s fine. You may leave now.”

After the newcomer spoke to the man, he revealed himself.

He was a skinny man.

His eyes were sunken in, and his face was a corpse-like pale white, which could be summarized in the word “lifeless”. His scalp was bereft of any hair, nor were there any eyebrows, eyelashes, or any body hair at all. He gave the impression that he was completely hairless.

Given that, there was no way to tell his age at all, but since there were no wrinkles on his skin, he probably was not that old.

The man was dressed in a dark red robe that was the color of dried blood, and wore a necklace made of the skulls of small animals. His hands were so shrivelled that they resembled claws, and his fingers — tipped with dirty yellow fingernails — were wrapped around a black staff. Rather than a human, he looked more like an undead monster.

“Hai~ Khazi-chan~”

The man frowned as he heard the girl’s playful greeting.

“Can you not address me like that? It’ll damage the reputation of Zuranon.”

Zuranon.

They were a powerful and evil secret society, counting several veteran magic casters among their number and led by a wise leader. After orchestrating several tragedies, they had become enemies of the countries in the region.

“Reeeeally…?”

The fact that the girl did not wish to change the way she addressed him made the man frown even more.

“...And then? Why did you come here? You know I’m infusing energy into the Orb of Death, right? If you’re here to make trouble, I have ways to deal with that too.”

The man narrowed his eyes, and tightened his grip on his staff.

“Nooooo, Khazi-chan~ I just came here to bring you this~”

The girl flashed him a coquettish smile and reached around under her cape. There was the sound of clattering, and then the girl triumphantly produced the item she had been looking for.

It was a circlet.

Countless small gems adorned thin, metallic threads, looking for all the world like a spiderweb covered in water droplets. The item was exquisitely made, and in the middle of the circlet — where the wearer's forehead would go — was a large black crystal.

"This is—!"

The man could not help but stare in silence.

Although he had only seen it from a distance, there was no mistake here. This was the crown he had seen once before.

"The symbol of a Miko Princess, the Crown of Wisdom! This is one of the treasures of the Slaine Theocracy!"

"Correct~ I saw a cute girl wearing this strange crown, but it looked so wrong on her head that I took it off~ And then I was sooooo surprised! She went mad~ peeing and crapping herself~"

The girl convulsed in laughter.

The Miko Princesses stood at the heart of the Slaine Theocracy's rituals. There was no way that she — as a former member of the Black Scripture — would not know what would happen when she snatched the Crown of Wisdom away from its bearer.

After all, when the time came for a new Miko Princess to be appointed, the job of the Black Scripture was to remove the Crown from its current wearer, and then promptly send the now-insane Miko Princess to be with the gods.

"Still, it can't be helped. It's the only way to obtain this — it's the fault of the person who made the Crown, he's the one to blame~"

There was no way to safely remove the Crown of Wisdom. The only option was to destroy it.

However, the Crown would delete the wearer's personality and turn a human being into a magic item that could use incredibly high-tiered spells, so nobody would do anything wasteful like destroying it.

Still, there were such madmen around.

“Hmph, to think you'd betray the Black Scripture for such trash. Why not steal one of the divine artifacts of the Six Gods?”

“Calling it trash is too mean~”

The man laughed at the girl who puffed up her face.

“Nothing wrong with calling it trash, right? Girls who can wear an item like this are one in a million. Finding a wearer for this would probably be impossible, even in the Slaine Theocracy.”

The Slaine Theocracy was the only one in the surrounding countries that kept detailed registers and genealogies of its citizens. Therefore, by consulting those registers, one could easily find a wearer for the item — in other words, a sacrifice.

Without that, it would be hard for even Zuranon to find such a person.

“But really now, it's impossible to get those artifacts~ After all, that antique show is guarded by the strongest monster of the Black Scripture, that ancient beast with the blood of the Six Gods that's beyond the realm of humanity~”

“A God-Kin, huh… Is that fellow really that strong? I've only heard about it from you."

"It's stronger than the idea of strength. The relevant information has been sealed up, which is why you don't know~ If someone who knew about it was interrogated with mind-affecting magic, it would be really bad. I've heard that it the secret got out, it'd lead to total war with the surviving true Dragon Lords, which means the Slaine Theocracy would get destroyed in the crossfire, so I hope you'll pretend you never heard any of it~"

"...I find that hard to believe."

"Well, anyone who hasn't seen that power would think so~ Well then, let's get down to business, Khazit Dale Badantel — are you willing to help me out as a fellow member of the Twelve Executives?"

The girl's tone finally changed.

"Oh, showing your true face at last, oh fragment of Quintia? But don't call me Dale. I've cast away that baptismal name."

"...Then, don't call me a fragment of Quintia, hm? Call me Clementine."

"...Clementine, what do you want me to help you with?"

"There's a pretty outstanding talent holder in this town, no? Maybe that guy could wear this item~"

"...I see, that guy from the stories. Still, you could easily handle the task of kidnapping a single human being by yourself, no?"

"Mm, that's right~ But I'd like some sort of confusion while I make my move~"

“I see… a distraction while you flee, huh…”

“What about it? What if I was willing to help with your ritual? It’s a good deal, right~?”

The man — Khazit — narrowed his eyes, and smiled evilly:

“Wonderful, Clementine. If you’re willing to help me, I can carry out the rite of death. Very well, I shall aid you with all the resources at my disposal.”

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Overlord Volume 2 Chapter 2 + Interlude

Journey

OVERLORD 「2」 The dark warrior
2章 旅路

Translator: Nigel
Proofreader/Editor: JcqC

Part 1

There were two routes leading northeast to Carne Village from E-Rantel.

One headed north, and then east along the outskirts of the forest. The other went eastwards, then north.

This time, they went by the first route.
Travelling along the edge of the forest meant that there would be a higher chance of encountering monsters. It was the wrong choice, from a bodyguard's perspective.

That said, everyone still wanted to go by that route. This was because Ainz wanted to fulfil the job Peter and friends first offered them, that of monster hunting. Although it seemed like they were taking a great risk — in the same way that a hunter chasing two hares would catch neither — the presence of the mighty Momon and Nabe meant that they could take that route with peace of mind. Another reason was that Nabe had demonstrated the spell [Lightning] outside the city, in order to prove that she could cast 3rd-tier spells.

In addition, they would not be entering the forest, just travelling along the edges. Thus, any monsters that appeared would not be too strong, and could be taken down by everyone working together. It was also a good chance for each adventurer team to observe the other's strength. They had taken these points into consideration before making their decision.

After leaving E-Rantel, the sun was at its zenith, and the travellers could see a vast stretch of dense and primeval dark-green forest in the distance. The thick tree-trunks stood tall, while their leafy branches spread wide. Because light could not penetrate into the depths of the forest, there was a feeling that they would be swallowed by the blackness. The gaps between the trees looked like a gaping maw waiting for prey to throw themselves into it, which contributed to the sense of unease that they felt.

♦♦♦

The group was arrayed around the wagon as they moved forward. Naturally, Nfirea was driving the wagon. Lukrut the ranger walked ahead of him, Peter the warrior was on the left of the wagon, while Dyne the druid and Ninya the magic caster were on the right. Finally, Momon and Nabe brought up the rear.

Visibility was good, so everyone was not too tense. However, Peter's voice contained its first hint of severity as he spoke:

"Momon-san, this stretch is a dangerous area. Although we should be able to handle any monsters that appear, please be careful all the same."

"Understood."

As Ainz nodded, he suddenly thought of something.

If he was in a game, he could tell what sort of monsters would spawn in a given location, but in reality, that would be impossible. Only the gods knew if a troublesome enemy would show up.

After the Battle of Carne Village several days ago and after interrogating the prisoners of the Sunlight Scripture, Ainz was quite confident in his strength. Of course, that was in his capacity as a magic caster. Now that Ainz was wearing a suit of magically-created plate armor, there were very few spells that he could cast.

Could he serve as an effective frontliner with all his strengths sealed off? In addition, as a bodyguard, his victory condition was not defeating the enemy, but protecting Nfirea from any harm. Ainz felt uneasy as he thought about that.

If the situation warranted it, he would remove his armor and use magic. But if he did that, he would have to kill his companions or alter their memories, and Ainz did not want that at all.

It's a pain in the ass.

Ainz turned to look at Narberal, who nodded under his gaze.

The two of them had already discussed their plans for emergencies. Narberal would cast magic of the 5th tier if things came to that. And if that did not work either, Ainz would shed his armor and take the situation a little seriously.

As he saw the two of them make eye contact — although Ainz was still wearing his full helm — It would seem that Lukrut was under some sort of misconception. He addressed Narberal in an airy, light-hearted tone:

“It'll be fine, don't worry. Things won't be too troublesome as long as we don't get ambushed. And nothing will escape my eyes and ears when I'm in charge. I'm great, aren't I, Nabe-san?”

In response to Lukrut's earnest demeanor, Narberal merely sneered:

“Momon-san, may I have permission to pulverize this… inferior lifeform (Aedes mosquito)?”

“Ah, Nabe-san graced me with her cold words!”

Everyone smiled bitterly as Lukrut raised his thumb, but they did not seem to mind Narberal's harsh retorts. They did not think that

Narberal really thought of humans in general as inferior lifeforms, just certain individuals (Lukrut) in particular.

Ainz denied Narberal's heartfelt request, feeling a cramping pain in his nonexistent gut. *If only she could hide her inner thoughts while travelling around humans...*

Nfirea seemed to have misunderstood something, and he interrupted from the side:

"It'll be fine. In truth, the region from here to Carne Village is the territory of the "Wise King of the Forest". Therefore, we shouldn't meet any monsters unless our luck is very bad."

"The 'Wise King of the Forest'?"

Ainz recalled what he had learned in Carne Village.

The Wise King of the Forest was a monster that could use magic, and it was frighteningly powerful. Because its lair was in the depths of the forest, there were virtually no eye-witness reports about it, although its existence had been a topic of discussion since very long ago. Some people called it a four-legged silver beast with a snake for a tail, which had lived for hundreds of years.

Ah, I'd like to see it. He did not know if the stories were true or false, but if it really had lived all these years, it should possess a surprising intellect. After all, it was called the Wise King of the Forest. If he could capture it… he should be able to strengthen Nazarick.

Ainz pieced together a hazy image of what he thought the monster looked like in his mind.

With a name like "Wise King of the Forest", it might be an animal previously thought extinct… like a monkey perhaps… ah, an orangutan? That name means "man of the forest"... or was that *“sage”? And it has a snake for a tail… does a monster like that exist?*

Ainz felt that Yggdrasil might have a monster like that. After racking his brains, he found an answer:

A Nue! ...That creature has a monkey’s head, a raccoon’s body, the limbs of a tiger and a snake’s tail… although I’m not sure if it really is an Yggdrasil monster. It might have been summoned, just like those angels.

Just as Ainz thought of Yggdrasil’s Nue, Lukrut called out to Narberal again in a flighty tone:

“Well then, if we complete this mission perfectly, I wonder if my lovely Nabe-chan’s affection towards me will go up a little more?”

Narberal clicked her tongue, her disgust welling up from the bottom of her heart.

Lukrut put on an exaggerated look of shock, but nobody spoke up for him. Everyone seemed to treat them as a comedy duo.

In this way, everyone chatted as they progressed forward, under the blazing sun that tanned the skin. Their boots were covered in the juices of trampled grass and smelled of plants.

As he watched everyone wiping their sweat, Ainz was extremely grateful for his undead body. The strong sunlight did not fatigue him, and even wearing this clumsy, heavy armor did not tire him out.

Only Lukrut remained energetic and cheerful, talking and laughing with the others, who were marching in silence:

“It’s okay guys, you don’t have to be so alert. After all, nothing escapes my eyes and ears. Even Nabe-chan trusts me, look how relaxed she is.”

“It’s not because of you. It’s because we have Momon-san.”

Narberal frowned. Sensing that something drastic might happen, Ainz put his hand on Narberal’s shoulder and her face immediately softened.

Seeing their interaction, Lukrut tossed out a question:

“Huh, so it looks like you and Momon-san really are lovers?”

“His, his lover! What are you saying! That should be Albedo-sama!”

“You!” Ainz shouted despite himself. “What are you saying, Nabe!”

“Ah!”

Narberal’s eyes went wide and she covered her mouth. Ainz coughed, and then coldly said:

“...Lukrut-san, could you not make baseless speculations?”

“...Ah — sorry about that. It was just a joke. But ah — does that mean you have a significant other already, Momon-san?”

The bowing Lukrut did not look remorseful at all, but Ainz was not as angry as he was just now. It would seem picking Narberal for this expedition was a foolish decision.

Still, despite his poor choice, Ainz had no alternatives in the matter. After all, he had nobody else to draw upon besides her. Almost all the NPCs made by the guild of heteromorphic beings, Ainz Ooal Gown, were heteromorphic beings themselves. There were very few among them who could be brought into a human city. As for Narberal, at least she had a human appearance, even if it was a disguise. Thus, she was one of the few people he could use… though he had not factored her personality into the equation when he made his choice.

Given the present circumstances, perhaps another battle maid, Lupusregina Beta, might have been a better choice, but it was too late to regret his decision at this point.

Narberal’s face was ashen white from her gaffe. Ainz patted her on the back several times to put her at ease. A good boss had to forgive the first mistake his subordinates made. The scolding would come when they repeated their mistakes. It would be bad if she fell into despair or withdrew from them, thus affecting their movements.

The important thing was that she had only mentioned Albedo’s name. There was no need to alter their memories… probably.

“Lukrut, don’t talk nonsense and stay alert.”

“Got it.”

“Momon-san, I’m very sorry for my colleague’s rudeness. We know that prying into other people's’ private lives is taboo.”

“No, no. I’m willing to let it be water under the bridge as long as you can be more careful in the future.”

The two of them looked at Lukrut’s back in unison, and they heard something along the lines of “Ah — Nabe-chan hates me now. Uuu, her affection value must be a negative number,” as Lukrut rounded his shoulders in defeat.

“That idiot…! I’ll scold him after this. I pray you will pay no heed to what he just said.”

“Well, about that… Hm. I’ll leave that task to you, then. Since

Lukrut's on lookout duty, we can leave that to him, and I'll talk a bit about myself."

"It's fine, it's fine. We'll make him work hard for the trouble he's caused you."

After Peter smiled to him, Ainz advanced to Dyne and Ninya. Dyne — switching places with Ainz — fell back to walk alongside Narberal.

"I have some things to ask you about magic."

After seeing Ninya nod his head, Ainz began with his questions. Nfirea seemed interested in their conversation and looked over.

"People who have been charmed or dominated by magic might reveal the information they carry. Is there a magical countermeasure that causes people to die after being questioned several times?"

"I've never heard of a spell like that."

Ainz turned, and his helmet faced Nfirea.

"Me neither. There are ways to modify a spell so it activates at a certain time, but I don't think they're as elaborate as what you describe."

"...I see."

Ainz was slightly disappointed when he did not get the answer he was looking for.

If that was the case, he would have to worry about how to deal with the surviving members of the Sunlight Scripture later.

Since there were so few survivors left, it would be a waste to expend them to no effect. In order to discover why they vanished after death, he had vivisected them with magical medical techniques, but it had ended up as a bust. If they died from that, should he continue prying information from them? After all, losing one man meant losing the chance to ask three questions.

Even more regrettable was the case of Nigun, who had been the first to die. They had lost Nigun, who knew the most, for the sake of a few simple questions.

Still, that loss let Ainz know that he could not take on this world with his knowledge of YGGDRASIL alone, so that could be counted as a lesson learned. At the very least, they had learned how to proceed from that failure.

As Ainz thought distractedly about that, Ninya continued speaking:

“That said, I only know a little bit about magic. Perhaps countries which trained magic casters on a national level could create spells like that. The Slaine Theocracy has academies for clerics — divine magic casters — while the Empire has institutes which produce their arcaners, sorcerers, wizards and other arcane magic casters. Then there’s places like the Agrand Republic, which uses something like the spells born of the wisdom of the dragons.”

“I see. In other words, spells like that could be created with the assistance of an entire country.”

According to the information obtained earlier, the Agrand Republic was a nation of demihumans, ruled by a council. It was in opposition to the Slaine Theocracy, which championed the concept of human supremacy. The most interesting thing about them were five of their councillors, who were dragons said to possess awesome power.

Ainz was interested in that country, but he had not found his feet in this world yet, and did not have the excess energy to spread his tentacles to that nation at the moment. Just keeping his current schemes running required a considerable amount of Nazarick's manpower.

"Then, may I ask about something else?"

Ainz continued questioning Ninya as he walked, until he was satisfied.

He asked Ninya and Peter so many things that the other Swords of Darkness looked at him with eyes that said, "Are they *still* talking?" The topics he touched on were quite diverse, including magic, martial arts, adventurers, the politics of the region, among other things.

Although he had to ask his questions carefully, the answers were still very helpful. Ainz was certain that this had greatly increased his knowledge about this world.

Yet, he did not feel that was enough. Learning about one thing made him curious about other things, especially when it came to the topic of magic. It was quite surprising what a world would become if it was based on magic.

The greatest influence of that could be seen in the technological level of this world. It looked like it was in the Middle Ages, but in truth it was closer to the Modern Age. The reason for these advances in technology was magic.

After knowing this, Ainz gave up on trying to understand the technology of this world. As a person born in a world advanced through the power of science, there was no way for him to draw parallels between what he knew and a world that had developed with the aid of magic. For instance, there were spells that produced salt, sugar, and spices, as well as spells which restored nutrients to the soil, removing the need for a fallow period in agriculture.

Then, there was the fact that the sea was apparently not salty. All these facts about the world were vastly removed from what Ainz had expected from his knowledge.

Ainz lost track of time in the process of carefully satisfying his curiosity.

“Movement.” Lukrut suddenly said, in a voice which held a hint of tension. It was completely different from the flighty attitude he had taken while flirting with Nabe. In his place was a professional, seasoned adventurer.

Everyone turned to the direction where Lukrut was looking, and readied their weapons.

“Where?”

“There. Over there,” Lukrut said in response to Peter’s question. He pointed at a corner of the forest, but nobody could see anything through the clutter of the forest. Even so, none of them doubted him.

“What should we do?”

“We shouldn’t force our way in. If they don’t leave the forest, we’ll leave them alone.”

“Then, the smartest thing to do is follow the plan and have Nfirea-shi fall back!”

As they discussed their next move, there were movements in the forest, and then monsters slowly revealed themselves.

There were 15 creatures that were the size of children, surrounding six huge creatures.

The first group were the demihumans called Goblins.

Their twisted faces had flattened noses, while two fangs thrust forth from their ravening maws. Their skin was a bright brown, while their filthy, matted black hair looked like it had been styled by wax.

They wore tattered clothes, which were a burnt sienna, though it was unknown whether it was dyed that color or stained that way by dirt. On top of that, they had fashioned tanned animal hides into a crude form of armor. Each held a wooden club in one hand and a small shield in the other.

They were evil-looking monsters, born of the mating of human and apes.

The less numerous creatures were huge, roughly 250 to 300 cm in height.

Their lower jaws jutted out, and they looked retarded.

Their heavily muscled arms looked like tree trunks. Their hands nearly dragged on the ground due to their hunchbacked stance. They used logs as clubs, and wore animal skins around their waists. They reeked so much that the adventurers could smell them over the long distance separating them.

Their tanned brown skin was covered in warts, while their muscular chests and bellies looked quite striking. At a glance, they looked to be very strong, and they resembled shaven, distorted chimpanzees.

They were demihumans known as Ogres.

Almost all of them seemed to carry tattered bags, as though for a long journey.

The monsters watched the adventurers warily as they advanced onto the grassy plains. They might have been some distance away, but there was an unmistakable hostility on their ugly faces.

“...There’s quite a number of them. Looks like we can’t avoid a fight.”

“Mm, that’s right. Goblins and Ogres are the kind who’ll attack once they outnumber their opponents. Or rather, I should say that intelligent beings would probably not judge their opponents’ strength simply by their numbers.”

Ainz could understand and accept this, but the fact that it was completely different from how it was in the game left him somewhat confused.

Be it in height or skin color, the Ogres and Goblins before him all differed from each other. In other words, they were not identical individuals. It felt like he was faced with 21 unknown monsters.

“Reality’s different from the game, huh.”

He felt like he was fighting unknown monsters in an unexplored region, without the benefit of a walkthrough site. As he recalled the feeling of that battle in Carne, Ainz began muttering to himself.

“Then, Momon-san.”

“...Oh, is something the matter?”

“Earlier, we agreed to divide them in half, but how shall we assign them now?”

“Can’t we split into two teams and dispatch the enemy as they come to us?”

“It would be troublesome if they all went to one side. Nabe-san, can you use [Fireball] to eliminate all the Goblins in one go?”

“I cannot use [Fireball]. The strongest spell I can use is [Lightning].”

Ainz thought about the restrictions he had given her earlier.

“[Lightning] is a spell that pierces in a straight line, right?”

“Then, what if we got the enemies to form up into a line, and then take them all out in one shot from the side?”

“In that case, we’d need a defensive line that can take the enemy’s charge…”

“Let me handle that. Can I trust you gentlemen with protecting Nfirea-san on the wagon?”

“Momon-san…”

“If a few Ogres could give me a hard time, then I’d be all talk. Everyone, please watch how I slaughter those Ogres.”

As they heard Ainz’s confident voice, understanding dawned on the faces of the Swords of Darkness. Their hearts filled with the peace of mind which came from knowing that they could leave that task to him without having to worry.

“Understood. However, we can’t just watch the enemy attack, so we’ll support you from the side as much as possible.”

“Do you need any support magic?”

“Ah, not for us. Friends from Swords of Darkness, please focus on supporting your comrades.”

“Please permit us to refuse. If we begin the engagement so close to the forest, there’s a chance the enemy might slip past.”

“If that’s the case, shall we do the usual and lure them out first?”

“An excellent idea! Momon-shi will block the enemy’s charge, but how will we deal with any fish which slip the net?”

“I’ll hold down the Ogres with the martial art [Fortress]. Dyne, you’ll handle the Goblins. Ninya will cast a defensive spell on me, and while it may not be necessary, you should also watch out for Nabe-san’s safety and use attack spells whenever possible. Lukrut, go take care of the Goblins, and if any Ogres make it past the defensive line, you’ll have to block them too. If that happens, change your priority to wiping out the Goblins, Ninya.”

Everyone looked to each other and nodded, showing that they understood Peter’s instructions. Their combat strategy was smoothly decided, and their silent teamwork was flawless.

Ainz, who was thoroughly impressed by this display, made a noise of quiet approval.

He recalled YGGDRASIL once more. Back then, Ainz and his comrades hunted monsters with the same repeated movements; baiting, luring, blocking and then attacking. They could fight well as a group because they were thoroughly familiar with each others’ strengths.

Perhaps he was being biased, but Ainz earnestly believed that their coordination was not an easy thing to replicate. The Swords of Darkness could not possibly compare to them, though he could see something like his own teamwork in their movements.

“Momon-san, do you need any assistance other than magic?”

“No, there’s no need. The two of us will be enough.”

“That’s… pretty confident.”

There was some unease in Peter's words. If the person responsible for holding the line fell easily, it might lead to a domino-like reaction that would end in the team breaking apart. He should have felt uneasy about that.

After all, this was not a game, but a battle on which they were betting their lives.

"You'll see once it begins," Ainz said, terminating the conversation with a curt reply.

"Peter-san, we'll start once your preparations are finished."

◆◆◆

Lukrut drew the string of his composite longbow to its limits, until its limbs began creaking. With a *whoosh*, the bowstring sliced through the air, launching an arrow in a straight line. It struck the ground about ten meters away from the Goblins on the plain.

The sudden attack made the Goblins sneer at Lukrut from behind their shields.

The object of their mockery was the missed arrow. Of course, the Goblins could not hit a target that was over 120 meters distant either, but they seemed to have forgotten that.

The vast disparity between the attack they had received and their numbers made the Goblins' violent instincts swell. They shouted in unison, and charged at Lukrut with wild abandon. The somewhat slower Ogres followed from behind them as well.

Driven into a frenzy by their bloodlust, they did not form up into ranks, nor did they protect themselves with their shields. Their minds were a sea of white.

As he verified that fact, Lukrut smiled thinly.

“Loose!”

He sent another arrow downrange when the enemy was 90 meters distant. This time, the arrow did not fall short, but pierced a Goblin’s cranium. The Goblin at the end of the formation took a few wobbly steps before collapsing to the ground, where he died.

The distance between them shrank, but there was no worry in Lukrut’s hand, which was holding his bow. This was because he was confident that someone would protect him, even if the enemy reached him.

“[Reinforce Armor].”

Ninya cast a spell from behind Lukrut, hearing his colleague’s voice, Lukrut nocked another arrow to his bowstring.

Fifty meters out, an arrow went through the head of another Goblin, who collapsed and did not get back up. Dyne decided to make his move as well.

Although Goblins were agile, the Ogres had large strides, and so their speeds were roughly the same. That said, over a charge of nearly 100 meters across a grassy plain, the Ogres with their stronger legs ended up in front while the Goblins lagged behind. The two groups drew away from each other and Dyne could not get too many of them in the area of his spell’s effect.

Still, that was enough. After, Dyne’s first objective was to pin down one Ogre.

“[Twine Plant].”

Dyne cast his spell, and vegetation moved under the feet of one of the Ogres, turning into vines that tangled around its feet. Immobilized by the abnormally resilient plant life, the Ogre roared in frustration.

At the same time, Ainz — followed by Narberal — strolled leisurely forward.

They walked like they were taking a stroll, not standing fast against charging monsters.

As the Ogres running at the head of the mob approached him, Ainz reached his hands behind his back to grasp the hilts of his swords. Narberal too reached under her cloak and brought forth her sheathed sword.

Momon brandished his greatswords, tracing two great arcs in the air.

The dazzling light reflecting off the blades made the Swords of Darkness gasp in surprise.

The swords that Ainz wielded — each over 150cm long — looked exceptionally ornate. They resembled works of art more than tools of war.

A pair of intertwined serpents were carved into the blades. Their tips were rounded and wider across than the rest of the sword, like a pair of opened fans. The edges radiated a cold, sharp radiance.

They were the weapons of a hero.

Ainz was holding a pair of hero’s swords.

As they beheld his majestic figure, Swords of Darkness drew a breath in unison. If what they had seen before made them gasp, what they saw now was a scene that struck them dumb.

Swords got heavier the longer they were. Long swords like the ones Ainz was holding could not be wielded easily, even with weight-reducing magic. Granted, they already knew that Ainz possessed preternatural arm strength from their short time with him, but even so, they could not believe anyone could swing those greatswords with such ease.

However...

Ainz casually whipped them through the air like a pair of sticks. Truly, it was an awe-inspiring sight.

“Momon-san… what kind of a man are you…” Peter breathed, as though speaking for everyone else.

As a warrior himself, he immediately knew just how strong one’s arms would have to be to pull off a stunt like that. His shock was because he had no idea how long Momon had trained to reach that level of ability. Although he had always felt that Momon was on a different level from himself, being confronted with the truth made his legs tremble uncontrollably.

Even the unintelligent Goblins were terrified by the sight of Ainz, their legs slowing from their mad dash as they went around him to go for Peter and the others.

Only the Ogres, who were too stupid to be afraid and who were supremely confident in their brawn, continued heading toward Ainz.

As they closed in on him, the Ogres raised their clubs.

Ainz’s greatswords might have been be huge, but the Ogres, with their massive greatclubs, had a longer reach than him. But just as the Ogres were about to make their move, Ainz stepped forward.

His movements were as swift as the wind. And then, faster than that, he swung the greatsword in his right hand. The flashing blade left a silvery afterimage in its wake as it cleaved through the air.

The stroke was an astounding one — it raised goosebumps on the onlookers' skin. Even though the blade was not aimed at them, they could not help but feel that death stood by their side.

It was over in a single blow.

Ainz turned his gaze from the Ogre in front of him, seeking another target. As though waiting for Ainz to look away, the upper body of the Ogre slid off and fell wetly to the ground, leaving its motionless lower body still standing. Yet, the spray of blood and organs and the vile stench that hung in the air proved that this was not an illusion.

The Ogre had been cut diagonally in half.

The battle was still on, but both sides were motionless. They were staring at this awesome sight.

It was slain in a single blow. Not even an Ogre's mighty physique could save it from the fate of being cut in two.

"...Amazing."

Someone muttered those words, which carried clearly across the silent battlefield.

"...Absolutely incredible. This is beyond mithril or orichalcum… no, could he be adamantite?"

Cleaving a foe into two parts.

This was not an impossible feat of arms. A rare few exponents of swordsmanship — or those bearing powerful magic weapons —

might be able to do it. However, it was common sense that one could not use one’s full strength when wielding a two-handed greatsword with one hand. After all, two-handed weapons were, as the name implied, intended to be wielded with both hands, using the weight of the weapon and the leverage of its length to do damage. They were not intended to be wielded by arm-strength alone.

Therefore, from Ainz’s movements, the possibility existed that his sword might be enchanted with magic beyond the ken of normal magic items, or that Ainz with one hand was stronger than a regular warrior with both arms, or both.

In the face of this jaw-dropping sight, the ogres unconsciously stopped moving, and began backing off with looks of fear on their faces. Ainz strode forth, shrinking the distance between himself and the ogres.

“What’s wrong? Not coming?’

His casual, relaxed words resounded through the battlefield.

These simple words filled the ogres with fear. After all, they had seen with their own eyes the vast disparity between their own power and Ainz’s.

On his part, Ainz closed the gap to the ogres with startling speed. His movements were swift, with a speed that someone wearing a suit of full plate armor should not have possessed.

“Uooooh—!”

With a cry that sounded like a cross between a wail of despair and a shout, the ogre before him raised his great club to smite the oncoming Ainz. However, everyone here knew in their guts that the ogre was far, far too slow.

As Ainz closed in, he swung the greatsword in his left hand horizontally.

The ogre’s upper body spun through the air, landing some distance away from the rest of its body.

This time, it had been transversely bisected.

“Momon-shi… are you a monster…?”

As yet another breathtaking scene unfolded before their eyes, none of them could bring themselves to refute Dyne’s words.

“...Then, as for the rest of you...:”

Ainz stepped forward. The ugly faces of the ogres froze, and they retreated even faster.

The Goblins circled around the ogres and Ainz’s defensive line to attack Peter and the others. Swords of Darkness, stunned by the sights they had just seen, managed to react to the assault and began moving.

Peter raised his broadsword and large shield, prepared to take on the ten or so Goblins headed toward him. He slashed forward, sending a Goblin’s head flying into the air, and then Peter evaded the arterial spray before entering melee with the other Goblins.

“Take this!”

The yellow-toothed Goblins responded with a garbled cry that was hard on the ears.

Peter adroitly blocked the Goblin’s club with his shield, while his magically reinforced armor took the rest of the hits with a low-pitched sound.

“[Magic Arrow].”

Two magical missiles struck the Goblin trying to attack Peter from behind. It collapsed like its strings had been cut.

Half of the Goblins surrounding Peter rushed the other three adventurers, but none of the Goblins dared attack Narberal, who stood beside the storm of death called Ainz.

Lukrut put down his composite longbow and drew a short sword from his waist. Together with Dyne, who wielded a mace, the two of them ran to Ninya and placed their backs against his.

Lukrut and Dyne were matched against five Goblins, and the odds seemed roughly even. Although the Goblins were being eliminated one by one, it was still very time-consuming, under the present circumstances. Lukrut’s face was a mask of pain as he endured the pain from his arm — it had been struck by a Goblin’s club — as he thrust his shortsword into the gaps of his opponent’s leather armor. Dyne had taken several hits as well, and as a result his movements slowed down, but he was not in any mortal danger.

Ninya surveyed the battlefield anxiously, with an eye toward conserving his spells. Although some of the ogres were immobilized by magic, he might have to deal with them if the situation changed.

As for Peter, he was engaged in a fierce battle with six Goblins, and the struggle went back and forth several times.

The reason why they had not been overwhelmed by eleven Goblins was because the Goblins’ charge had been blunted. After seeing Ainz’s preternatural ability to kill ogres in one blow, the Goblins’ morale plummeted, and they could not make up their mind whether to flee or fight.

Then, Ainz swung his sword in a grand, sweeping arc, as though announcing his intent to utterly demoralize the Goblins.

As the sound of the displaced air swept into everyone's ears, they could hear the sound of a heavy weight hitting the ground. It was soon followed by two more such sounds.

Just as everyone had expected, the number of Ogre corpses steadily increased. There were two more Ogres struggling to hold on to life. One of them was pinned down by the grass, while the other was quaking in fear before Ainz.

Ainz's helmet turned to face the last ogre who was still opposing him. The ogre seemed to sense Ainz's expression through the slits of his closed helm, because it made a strange cry before turning to flee, discarding its greatclub as it ran for the forest. It was moving faster than when it charged, but there was no escape for it.

"Nabe, do it."

As the merciless order rang through the air, Narberal — who had been standing by behind Ainz — nodded slightly.

"[Lightning]."

The electrical discharge thundered through the air as it leapt forth, and the stroke of lightning cleanly pierced the fleeing ogre's body. It even went through the ogre behind it, the one which had been entangled by Dyne's spell.

That single spell put paid to two ogres.

"Run!"

"Run away! Run away!"

The Goblins, who had watched this scene in stunned silence, began fleeing as they screamed in terror. However, Peter was too fast for them, and the demoralized Goblins were no threat to him.

The adventurers felled the Goblins two and three at a time. In addition, Ninya — no longer bound to conserve mana — began throwing attack spells into the fray. In the blink of an eye, the Goblins had been crushed, with no survivors.

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Amidst the vile corpse-stench that hung in the air, Dyne healed Lukrut's and Peter's wounds with the spell [Light Healing]. With nothing else to do, Ninya began cutting off the Goblins' ears with a dagger.

They would be paid for turning in the ears to the guild. Of course, adventurers did not claim their bounty with monsters' ears alone. Rather, they submitted different body parts as appropriate for different types of monsters, However, Goblins and Ogres were demihumans, so for the most part, ears were used in their case.

Ninya cut the ears off with practiced ease, and then he noticed that Ainz and Narberal were looking around the place where most of the Ogres had died. They seemed to be searching for something.

"What's wrong?"

After hearing Ninya's question, Ainz lifted his head and replied:

"Ah, I was just thinking… do these monsters drop items, in particular, crystals or the like?"

"...Crystals? I've never heard of ogres carrying anything like crystals."

"I see. I was just wondering if they carried treasure."

"Indeed. I'd be jumping for joy if Ogres had treasure too," Ninya replied as he removed the ogres' ears with practiced movements.

"Still… you're amazing, Momon-san. I knew you were a warrior who was proud of his abilities, but I didn't think you'd be that amazing."

As they heard Ninya's words, the other three adventurers, who had finished with their healing magic, began saying to Ainz:

"That was great! I'm in awe of you, as a fellow warrior. How did you train up your arms like that?"

"I thought you were quite wealthy from the way you were accompanied by Nabe-chan, but what kind of swords are those? I've never seen such valuable-looking swords before."

"I know now that what you said at the guild was not a bluff. Truly, you're on par with the Kingdom's mightiest warrior."

Narberal held her nose high as she watched from the side.
However, Ainz was frantically waving his hands about:

"Oh, there's no need to say that, it was nothing much."
"Nothing much…"

Peter and friends smiled bitterly.

"...After that battle, I finally understand what they mean by 'always someone better'."

"I'm sure you'll all be able to surpass me with ease."

Ainz's reply made the smiles of the Swords of Darkness' faces even more bitter.

Peter and the others had worked hard to make themselves stronger, and they had carefully saved all their earnings, using them to strengthen themselves. They could get along because they all shared the same goal. However, even when they looked back on all the effort they had put in since becoming adventurers, none of them could imagine themselves on Ainz’s level. To the Swords of Darkness, Ainz stood upon a pinnacle that almost nobody could reach.

This person travelling with them would someday become a hero, whose name would be known to all. He would become a great person that would stand atop all other adventurers.

Everyone was certain of that.

Part 2

Although it was some time from dusk, the adventurers were already setting up camp.

Ainz took the wooden poles handed to him by others and erected them around the campsite. Because they had to shelter a horse and wagon, the campsite in question was around 20 meters on each side and covered a fairly large area.

The poles went into four points around the campsite, and then thin, blackened ropes were tied around the poles, forming a perimeter. Finally, they tied a knot in one of the ropes and pulled it over to their tents, where they attached a big bell to it. This was their alarm system.

As Ainz was driving the poles into the ground, Narberal came around.

...Narberal should have some work to do… maybe she's finished. But if that man (Lukrut) made her mad again, all I can do is gently reprimand her...

With those thoughts in mind, Ainz turned around. As he did, Narberal spoke, in a low voice that suggested that she was holding back feelings of anger:

"...They should not be troubling you with work like this, Momon-san."

Ainz sighed in relief as he learned the reason for her anger. He looked around, and then quietly replied:

"Everyone's working together to pitch camp. It would be odd if I was the only one not doing anything, no?"

"Have they not seen your extraordinary fighting skill? People should do what they are suited for, so this sort of work should be left to weaklings like them."

"Don't say that. Listen, we need to establish ourselves as powerful individuals, but we mustn't project an image of arrogance while we do it. You need to check yourself a little too."

Narberal nodded to show that she understood, but her displeasure was evident on her face. She was only going along with this because it was an express order from Ainz himself.

He could tell that her loyalty was enough to overcome her unhappiness. On the other hand, the thought that this might cause a slip-up at an inopportune time made Ainz feel uneasy.

The truth was that Ainz was having a lot of fun with these outdoor activities. After all, this was something he could not experience in the virtual world of YGGDRASIL, let alone real life, and thus it was filled with novelty. Although the whole thing had taken too much time, it also reminded Ainz of the adventures he had exploring unknown places in YGGDRASIL.

If I was the only one who came to this new world, without the whole of Nazarick with me, I'd probably have gone travelling without a second thought.

The undead did not need to eat, drink, or breathe. That being the case, they could climb high mountains with their own two legs, or walk into the ocean depths. He would have enjoyed himself by witnessing the unknown vistas of the world.

However, now that his comrades' treasures — his loyal subordinates — were here, Ainz felt that he should repay their loyalty by ruling Nazarick well.

Ainz cast his thoughts aside and calmly returned to his work. After hammering the four wooden poles into the ground, he tied the rope around them and then raised the tent over it.

“Thanks for your hard work.”

“Think nothing of it.”

Lukrut was inside the tent, and he thanked Ainz without looking at him. It was kind of rude, but it was not as though he was slacking off either. He had been digging a hole for a stove ever since just now.

The magic caster — Ninya — was pacing about the surroundings, incanting a spell as he went. This was an [Alarm] spell, and as the name suggested, it was a spell of warning that would trigger if anything trespassed on their camp. Though it had a small area of effect, it was still useful just in case.

This spell, which did not exist in YGGDRASIL, made Ainz narrow his eyes.

Although he had handed the task of learning about unknown magic to other people, as a magic caster, he still felt the desire to know about spells he had never seen before.

The magic Ninya used was a spell of the arcane type, like the kind that Ainz could cast. In addition, it looked very similar to a YGGDRASIL spell. Ainz had used a racial skill called Dark Wisdom to perform a rite which increased the number of spells he knew.

Could I learn spells that weren't in YGGDRASIL by making a live sacrifice? Or is there another way? There's so many things I know nothing about...

As Ninya realised Ainz was staring at himself, he smiled and drew closer to Ainz.

“Ah, there's no need to watch me so intently. It must be pretty boring, right?”

“Well, I'm curious about magic, and I'm interested in what you're doing, Ninya-san.”

“No way… I'm probably far below Nabe-san, aren't I?”

“It's because you know spells that Nabe doesn't.”

Narberal nodded slightly, but Ainz noticed from the corner of his eye that the look on her face was more of jealousy than regret.

“I’d like to cast spells like you, Ninya-san.”

“You’re greedy, Momon-san. To think you’d want spellcasting ability even though your swordsmanship is so amazing… no, I should say that you’re being an adventurer, right?”

“Magic doesn’t seem like the sort of thing you can learn in one or two days. Well, you need to connect to the world, but only people with the appropriate talent can do it. If not, you’ll need to take a long time to experience it.”

Those words came from Lukrut, who had cut in without turning to look from where he was setting up the campfire. Ninya’s face turned serious:

“Mm. Momon-san, I think you have that talent. You’re different from other people… kind of like you’re not human at all…”

Ainz’s non-existent heart seemed to lurch in his chest. Ainz wondered if Ninya had sensed that he was undead.

Although he had already veiled himself in illusions and counter-detection spells, Ninya might have seen through Ainz with an unknown spell or some other special ability. Therefore, Ainz asked Ninya:

“...Is that so? I feel that I am strong, but not inhumanly so. You’ve seen my face as well, so wouldn’t you think that as well?”

“I’m not talking about appearances… it’s just that after seeing you fight, you’re clearly beyond the realm of humanity. Taking out an Ogre in one blow… as I thought, a real man gets by on strength, not looks. And you’ve got a beauty like Nabe-san with you.”

Upon closer consideration, Lukrut seemed to be saying that the illusionary face which Ainz showed them was an ugly one. However, when he thought about the looks of everyone he had met so far, Ainz could only sit down and accept his opinion.

There’s too many handsome men and beautiful women in this world! Even the passers-by look attractive. After coming here, I’ve got a worse opinion of my own looks...

“Appearances aside, Lukrut has a point. A hero is someone who surpasses the realm of human possibility. I get that feeling from you too.”

“No, that’s too much… I wouldn’t dare claim to be any sort of hero, even if it was to be polite.”

As Ainz feigned embarrassment while answering Ninya, he resisted the urge to sigh in relief.

“If it’s convenient for you… would you like to meet my master? Master’s talent lies in detecting an individual’s magical power. If you were born with magical potential, Master should be able to sense it. When it comes to arcane magic casters, Master can even differentiate between them by the tiers of magic which they can cast.”

“I’ve been meaning to ask for a while… is that talent the same as the one possessed by the Empire’s head magician?”

“Yes, it’s the same talent.”

Ainz could not let information like this slip through his hands. He had to continue asking about it.

“...What is this ability like?”

“Ahh, according to Master, we magic casters radiate something like an aura from our bodies. The more adept one becomes in magic, the stronger this aura becomes. Master has the ability to see these auras.”

“Oh… oh.”

Ainz immediately suppressed the quiet surprise in his tone, and in order to cover it up, promptly responded in a more normal tone.

“This was how Master gathered up talented children and trained them in magic. I was recruited by Master in that way,” Ninya continued.

Ainz nodded and cursed silently in his heart. *There’s people with abilities like that. This could be troublesome...*

“Then, if I wanted to learn how to cast spells, where should I begin?”

“For starters, you’d need a proper teacher.”

“...And how about becoming your disciple, Ninya-san?”

“Hm… you should probably find someone more skilled than myself. However, schools in the Kingdom are very exclusive and people without connections can’t join the guilds that handle magic. Even if you could join, most of the recruits would be immature kids. It would be very difficult for someone of your age to get in without some kind of special networking, Momon-san. On that note, the Empire has a full-fledged magical academy, and the Theocracy has a very high standard of magical education as well, though that’s for divine magic.”

“I see, so if I entered the Empire’s magical academy, I could learn magic?”

“That would be pretty difficult. The academy is an educational institution run by the government, so I think you’d have to be a citizen of the Empire to study there.”

“Is that so…”

“And as for becoming my disciple, though I apologise for it, I must refuse. I have something I want to do, and I don’t have the free time to train people.”

Ninya’s face went grim. There were hints of hostility amidst the negative emotion there.

Maybe I shouldn’t pry too deeply. There’s no merit to doing so.

Just as Ainz came to that conclusion, Lukrut interrupted his train of thought with casual words:

“Oi~ sorry to interrupt your conversation, but dinner’s ready. Do you mind calling those three back here?”

“Let me go, Momon-san.”

“Ehhhh~ Nabe-chan, you’re going off? Why not stay with me and make a dinner filled with love?”

“Die, inferior being (centipede). Unless you want me to pour boiling oil down your throat so you can’t utter such nonsense again?”

“Enough, Nabe. Let’s go together.”

“Yes! Understood!”

After thanking Ninya, Ainz approached the two people working quietly on the ground, a short distance from the tent.

Peter and Dyne were focused on caring for their weapons. They oiled them to prevent rust from building up, inspected them carefully to see if they were bent, and so on.

There were fresh dents on their armor, and cracks on their swords from where they had clashed with the Goblins’ weapons. Naturally, these defects had to be remedied as soon as possible, and the two of them were so focused that Ainz did not know whether he should call out to them.

After telling them that dinner was ready, he informed Nfirea about the matter at the place where the wagon was tied up, a short distance away.

♦♦♦

The sun touched the horizon, and the group had their dinner against the ruby radiance of its dying light.

In their hands, they held bowls of thick stew flavoured with bacon bits, as well as toasted bread, dried figs, walnuts, and other nuts. This was today’s dinner.

Ainz looked at the bowl of stew in his hands. It appeared to be very salty. He could not feel the heat of the bowl through his metal gauntlets, but judging from the way everyone else was digging into it with big mouthfuls and not blowing on it to cool it down, it should have been just the right temperature.

Now then, what shall I do?

Ainz was undead, and he could not eat with this body of his. In addition, he had disguised his appearance with an illusion. If he tried to drink soup with his skeletal mouth and body, it would probably spill out right away.

He could not let the others see that, no matter what.

This was unknown food and drink from an unknown world. Though the dishes before him were plain fare, Ainz felt that it was a shame to not be able to enjoy them.

Though he no longer had a need or desire to eat, he was unhappy with the fact that he could not consume the delicious-looking food that piqued his curiosity.

For the first time since he had come to this world, he regretted this undead body of his.

“Ah~ is there something you’re scared of eating?” Lukrut asked as he noted that Ainz had not touched his food.

“No, it’s just a personal matter.”

“Is that so? Then you don’t need to force yourself, right? Although, we’re eating now, so could you take off your helmet?”

“...It’s a religious reason. I can’t eat with more than four people on a day when I take life.”

“Oh… that’s an unusual faith you follow, Momon-shi. Still, the world is large, and religions like that aren’t particularly strange.”

The doubt in their eyes faded away once they learned that it had something to do with religion.

It seems religions in this world are a complicated matter.

As Ainz thought that, he gave silent thanks to the gods he did not believe in for somehow letting him muddle through this. Then, he asked Peter:

“I recall your team name is Swords of Darkness, but I don’t see a black blade among you…?”

On the topic of the group’s weapons, Peter used a longsword with an ordinary enchantment, Lukrut favored the bow and arrow, Dyne used a mace, and Ninya used a staff. Peter’s sword and Lukrut’s backup shortsword were both blades, but neither of them had a color that was anywhere close to “dark”.

There was a technique to tint metal a different color by depositing a special powder on its surface, so creating a black sword was not a difficult task. Rather, it seemed odd that none of them bore a blade of that color.

“Ah, so it’s that kind of question.”

Lukrut smiled bitterly, as though someone had brought up an embarrassing memory. Ninya’s face flushed bright red, a distinctly different color from the fire’s glow.

“They’re the swords of Ninya’s dreams.”

“Come on, that’s enough, I was just being childish.”

“That’s nothing to feel bad about! It’s important to have a great dream!”

“Give me a break Dyne, I’m serious.”

Good-natured laughter accompanied Ninya’s teasing by the other Swords of Darkness. Ninya, on the other hand, was so embarrassed that he was looking for a hole to crawl into. It would seem the name Swords of Darkness contained a secret that only its members knew.

“Well, the name ‘Swords of Darkness’ refers to the swords borne by one of the Thirteen Heroes.”

The smiling Peter stopped there, seemingly unwilling to go any further.

Even if he says that, I’m not sure what’s going on… still, I know that the Thirteen Heroes were the superheroes who destroyed the Demon Gods, who were rampaging across the world two hundred years ago. If I’m ignorant about these heroes and their gear… would it be embarrassing? Or should I just say that I know?

Just as Ainz was agonizing over this issue, Narberal cut in from aside.

“What are they?”

Wonderful. Ainz struck a victory pose in his heart, but surprise crossed the faces of the members of Swords of Darkness.

Just about anyone would be shocked that someone knew nothing about the magic weapons for which the team was named.

“Nabe-chan, you didn’t know?… Well, it’s not as though it’s unforgivable. He was one of the Thirteen Heroes, but because people thought he had demonic ancestry, he ended up being more of an anti-hero instead. Therefore, his origins were covered up in the saga of the Thirteen Heroes… though I’ve heard that he was a very powerful person.”

“The Swords of Darkness belonged to the man known as ‘Black Knight’. It was one of the four swords he possessed. There was the demonic blade Kilineyram, which could emit dark energy, the blade of rot, Crocdabal, which inflicted wounds that would not heal, the fatal blade Sfeiz, which could kill with the merest scratch, as well as the evil blade Hyumilis, whose powers are unknown.”

“Oh—”

Everyone smiled bitterly at Narberal’s unenthusiastic reply.

However, Ainz tilted his head in pensive musing. Those abilities seemed familiar.

After careful thought, the image of a vampire appeared in his mind. Those special abilities were similar to the skills possessed by Shalltear Bloodfallen, who had levels in the Cursed Knight class.

Cursed Knights had the backstory of being corrupted cleric-knights who had been cursed, and they were considered to be a very strong class in Yggdrasil. However, they had a lot of drawbacks, so they were not very popular. Among the skills Cursed Knights could learn was the ability to release waves of darkness, inflict cursed wounds which could not be healed by low-level healing spells, instant-death curses, and so on.

Ainz narrowed his illusory eyes under his helmet. This was not a coincidence. While the Swords of Darkness might be weapons with powers similar to those of a Cursed Knight, it was more likely that the hero himself was a Cursed Knight.
If that were the case, when one considered the prerequisites to become a Cursed Knight, it was certain that this “Black Knight” was at least level 60 — no, if one considered that he had to actually learn all those skills as well, he would have to be at least level 70.

It would seem the Demon Gods were evenly matched against heroes like that, so it was a reasonable hypothesis that their levels were roughly the same. However, Nigun of the Sunlight Scripture said that the Dominion Authority which he summoned could defeat a Demon God, so it would seem that the Demon Gods and the Heroes were not on the same level.

After comparing this new information with what he already knew, it seemed logical that the Demon Gods were not all equally powerful. However, the only way to know for sure would be to meet that hero or obtain that sword.

As Ainz pondered this, the rest of the group continued talking. Ainz hurriedly shifted his attention to their conversation; it would be a shame to miss out on a chance to learn something because he was distracted.

“—So finding those swords was my first objective. There’s a lot of legends about weapons out there, but some of them have been proven to exist. The thing is that the existence of the Swords of Darkness is still a mystery—”

“Ah, there’s someone out there who possesses one of the Swords of Darkness.”

After Nfirea calmly dropped that bombshell, the Swords of Darkness turned on him:

“Who, who’s that?!”

“Uwah! Really? So that means there’s only three left!”

“Oh, that means we won’t be able to distribute them evenly to everyone now…”

Nfirea gingerly replied:

“Er, about that… the person who owns that sword is the leader of the adventuring party called ‘Blue Rose’.”

“Geh, adamantite, you say? Adventurers like that? Then it can’t be helped.”

“That’s true. Still, there’s three of them left; let’s work hard so we can be strong enough to take them into possession.”

“Indeed. Since one of them is the real deal, that means that the other three exist as well. I hope these swords are hidden in a place that nobody’s discovered until us.”

“Ninya, you’d best write it down in your diary so you don’t forget.”

“I know, I’ll write it down for sure. However, the stuff in there is personal, so shouldn’t you memorize it instead?”

“It’s better to have a hard copy!”

“Is that the problem, Dyne…”

“Still, we have ‘that’.”

“What is ‘that’?”

“This, Momon-san.”

Peter took a dagger with four jewels embedded into its scabbard. It had a black blade.

“Before we discover the real thing, I planned to use this as the party’s symbol…”

“Still, ‘Blade of Darkness’ would work just as well as ‘Swords of Darkness”, right? Come to think of it, it’s not as though it’s a fake. It’ll make the perfect symbol of our group!”

“Oooh, Lukrut’s making sense for once!”

The adventurers laughed, radiating an air of camaraderie.

Ainz was affected by this as well, and smiled in response. They probably felt the same way about that dagger as Ainz did about the staff which represented the guild.

The dinner conversation continued, and Swords of Darkness, having the advantage of numbers, tossed questions out at Ainz, Narberal and Nfirea.

Ainz responded as best as he could, but he still felt a barrier separating him from Swords of Darkness. This was because Ainz lacked knowledge about this world, and he could not engage too fully lest his ignorance be revealed. Thus, Ainz kept quiet about things he did not know, which in turn led to him drawing even further away from the adventurers in a vicious cycle.

Though the adventurers tried to chat up Narberal, all she did was respond with the verbal equivalent of a home run, leaving them with no way to respond. Eventually, they slowly stopped trying to speak to her.

Nfirea, on the other hand, was handling this quite well.

As a native of this world, he got along better with the others than Ainz. He was observant and could follow the adventurers' discussion well.

...It's nothing. I had friends like these once.

These childish thoughts, almost like a tantrum, ran through Ainz's head as he watched the others chatting happily in the campfire's light.

They seemed very close to each other, but that was only to be expected of a group of comrades who trod the edge of life and death in each other's company. Nfirea had a look of envy on his face as he looked upon them.

Ainz recalled his friends from the past, and under his helmet, he quietly ground his teeth in jealousy.

—Once, he had been like them.

“...Well, you seem like a chummy bunch. Are all adventurers like that?”

“I should think so. After all, adventurers are colleagues who face death together. It’d be dangerous if they didn’t understand each other and what they planned to do. So somewhere along the way, adventurers end up being quite close to each other.”

“Indeed. After all, we don’t have any women in our team. I heard that parties with women tend to have a lot of arguments.”

“...Yeah.”

With an indecipherable smile, Ninya continued:

“And if there were, Lukrut would be the first to raise questions. After all, our group has a very clear objective, right?”

Peter and the others nodded in unison.

“...Just like that. It feels completely different when everyone is of one mind.”

“Hmm? Momon-san, were you in an adventuring party before?”

Ainz did not know how to answer Nfirea’s question, but right now, he had no need to make up some strange excuse to cover it up.

“We probably didn’t count as… adventurers.”

He could not help but take a somber tone as he thought about his past friends. After all, he still had emotions — even though his body was undead — and his friends were the people that Ainz treasured most.

Sensing Ainz’s difficulty in answering, nobody pursued the matter, and silence fell upon the group.

Amidst this quiet, so deep and so total that it felt like they were the only people in the world, Ainz unconsciously raised his head and looked into the star-studded night sky.

“When I was still a weakling, a paladin of pure white with sword and shield in hand saved me. Through him, I met four more comrades. And so, we formed a team that numbered six people, including myself. In addition, after that, we met three more weak people like ourselves, and we ended up as a team of nine people.”

“Ohh—” someone exclaimed quietly, amidst the crackling of the campfire. However, Ainz was not bothered, and he continued recounting the story of the original nine members of what would become Ainz Ooal Gown.

“They were all excellent companions. A paladin, a swordmaster, a priest, an ass… a thief, a two-sword nin… a two-sword thief, a sorcerer, a chef, a blacksmith… they were all irreplaceable friends. We had countless adventures together, and until now, I still haven’t been able to forget these days.”

Through them, he had learned the meaning of friendship. He once thought he would have been ignored in YGGDRASIL, like in the real world, but unlike reality, they ended up being the best of friends, who would extend a helping hand to each other at any time. And so, as the number of group members steadily increased, they shared their joys and their sorrows together.

Therefore, the guild called Ainz Ooal Gown was a treasure to Ainz.

He would ensure its brilliance was never diminished, even if he had to discard or destroy everything to do so.

“I’m sure you’ll find companions like them again someday.”

In response to Ninya’s comforting words, Ainz snapped:

“That day will never come.”
The hostility in Ainz’s tone startled everyone, even himself. Alarmed by what he had said, Ainz slowly rose to his feet.

“...Forgive me. Nabe, I’ll have my dinner over there.”

“Then I shall go too.”

“Really… well, if it’s a religious matter, then it can’t be helped.”

There was a hint of regret in Peter’s voice, but he did not insist on their staying.

Although Ainz noticed the depressed look on Ninya’s face, Ainz did not intend to say anything more to him.

Perhaps a simple “I’m not bothered by it” would have sufficed.

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The two of them had their dinner in the corner of the roped-off campsite area.

The ones who stayed behind discussed the pair which had left. It was only to be expected, given what the absent people had accomplished today.

Then, the conversation grew to a halt, and silence descended upon the group. The campfire crackled and spat glowing embers which danced into the sky. As Ninya watched the glowing traces vanish into the air, he muttered in a self-chastising tone:

“...I think I said something I shouldn’t have.”

“Umu. It seems like something happened in their past.”

Dyne nodded deeply, and then Peter continued:

“I guess they were all wiped out. I’ve seen that sort of reaction from people who lost all their friends in battle.”

“That... must be hard to bear. Even if we’re used to walking the edge of death together, losing a friend is still…”

“That’s right, Lukrut. The words spoken just now were not the best that could have been said.”

“Well, what’s said cannot be unsaid. Therefore, we need to do something that makes him change his mind about those words.”

Ninya looked quite depressed as he replied, and then he quietly continued, “I know what it’s like to lose someone, so why didn’t I put myself into his shoes?”

However, nobody responded to him.

The campfire’s logs cracked loudly and spat embers amidst the silence.

In an attempt to lighten the heaviness in the air, Nfirea gingerly spoke:

“...Momon-san’s fighting was really spectacular.”

As though waiting for these words, Peter immediately added:

“Yeah, I didn’t think it would be so amazing. He cut an ogre clean in two…”

“That was seriously over-the-top.”

“Beating an ogre in one blow is amazing in it’s own right, but how good do you have to be to cleave it in half?”

The Swords of Darkness looked at each other after hearing Nfirea’s puzzled question.

Nfirea was a young man who was famous for his innate talent, as well as an excellent magic caster. Although he might well shake the world with his abilities, it was difficult for him to understand the full extent of Ainz’s prowess without another warrior for comparison.

With that in mind, Peter began explaining to Nfirea, in a way that was as easy to understand as possible:

“Normally, greatswords are used in a hacking fashion, but he employed a slashing method. Usually, when using a greatsword one-handed, it would be very difficult to sever the limbs of enemies as large as ogres… but it would seem there’s an exception to that now.”

Nfirea gasped as he heard Peter’s words. Peter felt that Nfirea was not sufficiently awed, and decided to name someone he might be more familiar with:

“Honestly speaking, I think Momon-san is on the same level as the Kingdom’s Warrior-Captain.”

Nfirea’s eyes widened in astonishment. He finally understood what the Swords of Darkness thought of Ainz’s abilities.

“...That is to say, he could be an adamantite-ranked adventurer…

those people who are the highest-ranked adventurers, living legends, in other words, the mightiest human beings?”

“Indeed,” Peter replied as he nodded gently. Nfirea looked around at the other members of the Swords of Darkness, who were also nodding in approval.

He was dumbfounded.

Adamantite-ranked adventurers possessed guild plates made of adamantite, a rare magical material which was the hardest metal known to man. If adventurers and their numbers formed a pyramid, then adamantite-ranked adventurers would occupy the peak, and would be correspondingly scarce. Both the Kingdom and the Empire only boasted two teams of adamantite-ranked adventurers each.

Their abilities were at the zenith of human potential. One might even call them heroes.

And Momon was a person who could rival them.

“That’s incredible…”

One could hear the utter amazement in those words.

“At first… The first time I saw Momon-san, dressed in a suit of stylish full plate armor while wearing the copper-plate belonging to the lowliest of adventurers, I felt pretty jealous, but now that I’ve seen that he has the skills to match his looks, there’s nothing more I can say. He — Momon-san’s abilities are worthy of his full plate. I’m kind of jealous of how strong he is...”

Peter the warrior did not wear full-plate. Instead, he sported a suit of banded armor, which was somewhat less protective. This was not by personal preference; rather, it was the best body armor he could afford with his limited resources.

“Don’t worry about it; I’m sure you’ll be able to buy a suit of full plate soon, Peter.”

“Indeed. You should work hard towards that goal. Really, you should be glad that you’re fortunate enough to be able to witness an example of what it’s like to be at the top.”

“Ninya’s right, all you need to do is work hard to reach the target of Momon-san. We’ll support you too, so let’s move forward together.”

“That’s right! Slowly but surely, your hard work will pay off! I’m sure that Momon-shi must have trained even longer than you did!”

Dyne’s words awoke doubts in Nfirea’s heart:

“Have you seen what Momon-san looks like under his helmet?”

Ainz had not removed his helm after meeting Nfirea, not even while eating. How he drank was also a mystery.

“Yes, we have. He looks like an average person… though not one from nearby. He and Nabe-san have black hair and black eyes.”

“Is that so… did he say which country he was from?”

The Swords of Darkness looked at each other, and they suddenly realized that Nfirea seemed very interested in that topic.

“Well, he didn’t elaborate much on that…”

“Really now… ah, no, I was just thinking that if he came from a distant country, he’d use different potions than what was available in the surrounding region. It’s just my curiosity as a herbalist talking.”

“I see — well, he does seem to be from the same place as Nabe-chan, yet their looks are worlds apart — he doesn't look handsome at all. Would anyone like people like that—?"

"Well, he doesn't look like much, but with his strength, I'm sure there must be countless girls throwing themselves at him."

Powerful individuals were popular. This was because this world had monsters in it, and humans were on the bottom end of the power curve. As a result, the innate instincts of women made them desire strong males.

"Haah~ don't tell me my feelings will never bear fruit~"

"Nah, it's impossible. I don't think there was even a flower to begin with," Ninya replied with a bitter smile as he recalled Narberal's reaction.

"Utter nonsense. In any case, the important thing is to keep pushing and pushing and pushing. Eagerness is the key. 'Sides, she's a super-hot girl, right? If she's just a little bit nicer to me, it'll mean I've won at life."

"...She does look very pretty…"

Halfway through his somber reply, Dyne noticed that Nfirea had a bitter look on his face.

"Nfirea-shi, is something wrong?"

"Ah, no. Er, it's nothing…"

"Oya?"

Lukrut grinned lewdly. "What, you're in love with Nabe-chan?"

"Of course not!" Nfirea retorted with unnecessary loudness. From the intensity of his reaction, Peter sensed that they should not keep pressing him. Instead, he said:

“Lukrut, you’re being rude. Think before you talk.”

Nfirea looked uncomfortable, and he was not sure how to respond to Lukrut’s sincere apology.

“No, it’s not like that. Well… I’m just a little uneasy… would Momon-san really be that popular?”

“...Looks aside, he’d be a hit just going by his strength alone. Plus, he looks pretty wealthy, given the armor he wears and the swords he carries…”

“Ah…”

Nfirea’s face was cast in shadow. With the tone of a senior speaking to a junior, Peter carefully asked:

“Is something the matter?”

Nfirea wanted to speak, but cut himself off halfway. The effect repeated itself over and over again, making him look like a goldfish. However, Peter and the others did not press him — there was no need to force an answer out of him if he did not want to talk about it. Soon, however, Nfirea made up his mind, and finally managed to speak.

“Um — it’s because I don’t want to let the person I like in Carne Village fall in love with Momon-san.”

The Swords of Darkness deftly picked up on the hidden message within those words, and then smiled warmly.

“All right then, young man. Onii-san here will teach you his amazing technique—”

Peter punched Lukrut, drawing a queer howl from the latter. The Swords of Darkness paid no heed to the look of agony on Lukrut’s face and made to comfort the stunned Nfirea.

Lit by the radiance of the campfire, the boy finally smiled.

♦♦♦

At the same time—

The thrust went through the steel helmet, along with the forehead beneath it.

The body shook violently, and then collapsed like a puppet whose strings had been cut. The metal armor clanged loudly in the night. He prayed that someone would hear the sound, but nobody would come to E-Rantel’s beggars’ district, which had practically been abandoned by the residents. That was why the client had arranged to meet them here, after all.

The man glared at the young woman before him. However, it was clear that he was just putting on a brave front. He had lost the will to fight after seeing the woman casually kill three of his fellows.

The young woman who had murdered his colleagues flicked her bloodstained stilettos. The ichor scattered in all directions, and the blades recovered their cold shine.

“Nfufufufu~ and then there was one, onii-san~”

The woman revealed her canines with a predatory grin.

“Why, why are you doing this?”

He knew it was a stupid question, but the man had no idea why this was happening to him.

These men were the dropouts among adventurers. The term for them was ‘Workers’, or dusk workers. They took on jobs which were borderline, or sometimes outright illegal.

This might have been the result of some sort of grudge, but he had never worked in this city before. Neither had he seen this girl before.

“Ah, why I did this? Well now~ I just wanted you, onii-san~”

The man could not understand what the girl was talking about. He blinked several times, and then asked:

“What, what do you mean?”

“That famous herbalist’s grandson isn’t at home~ I wanted someone to keep an eye on them for me and see when they got back. I can’t be bothered with such troublesome things~”

“Then all you needed to do was ask! Weren’t you planning to do that in the first place?!”

Workers like themselves would gladly take illegal jobs, so he had no idea why this girl was slaughtering them.

“Nonono, you might have betrayed me~”

“We will never betray our employer once we’ve been paid the appointed fee!”

“Hmmm~? Then how about this? I like killing people, I love it, I’m absolutely crazy about it. Ah, and I like torture too,” the young woman added with a giggle.

After hearing this nonsensical reply, the man’s face hardened and he said: “You’re insane! Why?!”

“Why…?”

The young woman’s voice changed. The joking, teasing tone from just now was gone.

“Hmmm… I wonder why? Perhaps it was because my job involved killing lots of people? Maybe it was because I was constantly compared to my amazing big brother? How they loved him instead of me? Or how I was raped constantly before I became strong? Because my friends died in front of me? Or maybe it’s because I messed up and got captured and tortured for several days? Heated choke pears hurt, you know~”

It seemed as though there was only a little girl before him. But in the blink of an eye, a smile bloomed on the woman’s face.

“Just kidding~ I was making it all up, it’s a lie, a lie — never happened to me. Still, even if you knew, would it change anything? I’m this way because things piled up — ah, speaking of which, I need to thank Khazi-chan for helping me suss out all this info, I’m so glad I could meet you all right away~ you should know how long it takes to find help~”

The girl released her stilettos, which were pulled down by gravity and sank into the ground. Judging by their abnormal sharpness, they must have been made of something other than simple steel.

“This is orichalcum~ More precisely, its orichalcum alloyed over mithril. Pretty good stuff.”

The fact that she bore such exotic weaponry was a sign of the woman’s prowess. In other words, he had no chance of victory.

“Then~ time for the next step. I can’t use you if you’re heavily wounded, onii-san… buuuut Khazi-chan can heal you with divine magic no matter how much I hurt you~ which means I get to enjoy torturing you as muuuuch as I like, no?”

As she uttered those bone-chilling words, she drew another pair of stilettos from under her robe.

“These should be good… sorry if I miss~”

It was adorable, the way she stuck her tongue out at him. However, her filthy, blackened heart was visible for all to see.

The man turned his back to her and ran. Although he heard an exaggerated gasp of surprise from the young woman, he still ran with every ounce of strength in him. He was proud of his sense of direction, and he used it to the full as he ran through the lightless dark.

However, there was a clattering noise from behind him, followed by the woman’s calm voice.

“—Too slow~”

Searing pain filled his shoulder. His first thought was that he had been stabbed by a stiletto, and then a shadow fell over his thoughts.

Mind control.

The man desperately tried to resist, but that only mired his consciousness further in darkness.

The voice of “a friend” came from behind him.

“Ah~ Are you all right? Is the wound deep? “

“Mm, no, it’s fine,” the man smiled as he turned to face “his friend”.

“Is that so. That’s wonderful~”

A dreadful smile bloomed on the young woman’s face.

Part 3

The group set out at daybreak, along a hidden path on the plains.

“We’ll be at Carne Village soon.”

The other travellers nodded in response to Nfirea, the only person who had been to Carne Village before (barring Ainz). Apart from that, they walked on in silence. Nfirea seemed somewhat put off by that.

An air of awkwardness hung between them. Ainz, who was the cause of this situation, hid his guilt underneath his helmet.

Ninya kept peeking at him, and it was annoying. However, this was all his fault, so he could not say anything about it.

This was the result of what he had said last night.

Ninya apologized at breakfast, and Ainz should have accepted the apology on the spot, but for some reason, he could not say a simple thing like “I forgive you.”

Though he felt he was being petty, Ainz could not simply let bygones be bygones.

Because of this undead body, my mind has changed as well, huh...

After becoming undead, his strong emotions were suppressed, but the less intense ones did not vanish. The best proof for this was how long his mild anger lasted. Ainz’s friends had a very important place in his heart. Though he cared deeply for them, he began to feel that it might not be good to let things go on like this.

However, he could not bring himself to take the first step in changing the mood.

It was because he could calmly deduce that the slight changes in his feelings — like those of a petulant child — that he felt anger at his own immaturity.

The only one who stood out among the awkwardness was Narberal. She was so happy to not be bothered by Lukrut that she was practically humming in delight.

The group advanced in silence, and they soon made it to the outskirts of Carne Village.

“Ah, yes! It seems pretty wide here, so maybe we don’t have to stay in a line as we move,” Lukrut announced, seemingly with some other motive in mind.

A glance to the sides revealed stretches of emerald forest around them, so the deliberate mention of being wide and open seemed somewhat suspicious. In addition, the point of being guards was that they could not lower their guard in an open area, so moving in a column like they were doing now was the wisest choice.

It was just that they all knew their silent advance in a line was not due to their adventurer’s sense of caution.

“...It’s important to stay alert. So let’s… mm. Let’s get to the village first.”

“Indeed! We need to stay on guard at all times lest we get attacked!”

Lukrut put on an “as if” expression in response to Peter and Dyne’s statements.

“Maybe a dragon might attack us from far away,” Ninya mumbles. Lukrut immediately shot back:

“What kind of shitty plot development would that be? Logically speaking, how could such a thing happen, Ninya!”

“You’re right, it’s impossible. The stories of dragons near E-Rantel are nothing more than that, stories. Although they say that in the ancient past, there was a dragon which could shake the heavens and the earth… nobody’s seen any dragons recently. Or no, I think there’s a colony of Frost Dragons living along the Azellisia mountain range, towards the north…”

They existed in the past? According to the Sunlight Scripture, dragons are the mightiest beings in this world…

In YGGDRASIL, dragons were the strongest enemies one could encounter. They boasted great physical attack and defense power, boundless stamina and wielded numerous skills and spells.

They were in a class of their own.

There were countless monsters in YGGDRASIL. Among their number were all sorts of named monsters, and area monsters, as well as those super-monsters called World-Class Enemies. Even a legion, composed of six parties of six men each, would not have much of a chance against these unimaginably powerful creatures.

Apart from the “Devourer of the Nine Worlds”, there were the “Eight Dragons”, the “Demon Lords of the Seven Sins”, the “Ten Archangels of the Sephira”, as well as the six bosses known as the “Celestial Lord of the Sixth Heaven”, and the “Five-Colored Buddhas”, from the expansion pack “Valkyrie’s Downfall”. There were 32 of these extraordinary monsters in total, and one could infer the dev team’s love of dragons from the number of draconic entities among them.

I need to be careful if dragons exist. Dragons could live forever in

Yggdrasil's backstory, so it wouldn't be a surprise to encounter dragons with mind-boggling powers.

"Ah — could someone tell me the name of that dragon which could shatter the sky and shake the earth?"

Ainz was not nearly thick-skinned enough to nonchalantly ask a question of someone feuding with him, so he merely spoke in a low voice. However, that was loud enough for everyone to hear, and Ninya jerked his head back to look.

This was like a pair of quarrelling lovers looking for a chance to make up.

Ainz recalled a time when he had heard a pair of sweethearts talking in a coffeeshop, and could not help but compare their words to his present situation.

That said, Ninya's expression seemed a little brighter since it was Ainz who made the first move. The Swords of Darkness and Nfirea were all smiles as well. Only Narberal remained unmoved. Come to think of it, the awkwardness in the air since this morning had hardly affected her.

"I'm very sorry! I'll look it up for you when we get back to the city!"

Ah, no need to get so excited about it… it's fine if you don't know… I was just looking for something to say…

However, he could not bring himself to utter those words.

"Mm, Ninya-san. Could you help me find out, if time permits?"

"Understood, Momon-san!"

The way everyone nodded with exaggerated satisfaction made Ainz feel a little ashamed of himself. It might be different if the situation was the other way around, but he was filled with regret as the oldest one here.

“All right, we’re almost at Carne Village now…”

This was the first cheerful thing which anyone had said since this morning, but Nfirea clammed up almost immediately.

Everyone looked at the village before their eyes. It was a rustic hamlet at the edge of the forest. There was nothing strange or unusual about it, so Nfirea’s silence was a mystery.

“What’s wrong, Nfirea-san? Is something the matter?”

“Ah, no, it’s fine. Just… I don’t recall seeing a sturdy fence like the one in front of us...”

“Really? But it looks like an ordinary fence. Actually, it’s kind of shabby for a frontier village fence, right? It wouldn’t be a surprise that a village at the edge of the forest would have a sturdy fence to protect against monsters, right?”

“Hm — you might be right… but Carne has the Wise King of the Forest, so they’ve never put up a fence before…”

Everyone looked to the village. The village was surrounded by a fence as far as they could see, and the fence was made of logs which were resilient to cutting.

“How strange… did something happen...?”

Ainz remained silent, even after hearing the lad’s uneasy question. In the past, he had come here as the magic caster Ainz Ooal Gown, but now he was the adventurer Momon.

Ninya cut in, a serious expression on his face:

“Maybe I’m worrying too much… but I grew up in a village, and I still remember life there, so there’s two things I find suspicious. The first is that the fields haven’t been tilled yet even at this time, and the other is that they’ve already harvested some of the wheat.”

They looked in the direction Ninya was pointing and indeed, part of the wheat had already been taken in.

“I see. Looks like… perhaps something happened?”

Ainz turned to the group, all of whom had uneasy faces, and said:

“...Gentlemen, let us handle this. Nabe, go invisible and scout the village with flying magic.”

After acknowledging Ainz’s instructions, Narberal turned herself invisible with magic and vanished. Shortly after, they heard the sound of flight magic being incanted, and Narberal no longer left any tracks behind her. The travellers waited on the road, and after a while, Narberal reappeared where she had left.

“...The villagers seem to be moving normally around the village, and I did not sense that they were being controlled or ordered. The villagers are working on the fields on the other side of the village.”

“...Huh, looks like I was just being paranoid.”

“It should be fine. Then, let’s move on… shall we?”

Peter looked expectantly to Ainz and Nfirea, and they both replied in the affirmative.

The road narrowed as they went on, so they had to form up into a column as they approached the village’s entrance.

The wheat fields on either side of the road were a brilliant emerald, waving gently in the wind. The travellers looked as though they were submerged in a pool of green water.

“Hm?”

The wagon advanced with a clattering noise. Behind it, Lukrut made a noise of suspicion and studied the wheat fields closely. It was not yet time for the harvest, but the stalks were over 70 centimeters high, and they were as impenetrable as the ocean’s depths.

“What’s wrong?” Nfirea asked from his place at the back.

“Hm? Oh, nothing, maybe I was thinking too much…”

Lukrut tilted his head in bafflement, then quickened his pace, drawing closer to Peter.

Ninya looked in the same direction, and then opened up his steps once he made sure there were no other movements.

The wheat fields spilled over onto the road that led to the village, like the sea swallowing up the land. They wanted to cut down the stalks to ensure stable footing, but if they did that, problems would result in the future.

“I hope the villagers can tend their fields properly. This seems terribly wasteful.”

Peter walked at the head of the group and because his armor touched the wheat stalks, it was soon covered in wheat grains. Peter muttered as he saw this, feeling that something was wrong.

This was a warning born from his instincts, which had been honed through countless brushes with death. Would the green grains fall off so easily?

Driven by instinct, he looked back into the wheat fields, and saw a pair of eyes staring at them. It was a small creature, its body even smaller as it hunkered down in the wheat. Although its face was obscured by the wheat stalks, it was clearly not human in nature.

“What?!”

The shocked Peter wanted to shout a warning to his colleagues, but the creature — a demihuman — spoke first: “Could you put down your weapons, please?”

The diminutive demihuman already had its blade drawn, and no matter how fast Peter moved, his opponent could still stab him first.

“Yo, please put down your weapons. Could you tell the people behind you too? We don’t want to have to shoot them with arrows.”

There were faint sounds from another direction. When he looked to the source of those sounds, he found that there was a marvellously camouflaged hole in the wheatfields, with half a demihuman sticking out of it. The demihuman was covered in wheat stalks as further camouflage.

Peter was filled with doubt. It would seem there was room to negotiate with these creatures.

“...Could you spare our lives?”

“Sure we could. If you surrender, that is.”

Peter was at a loss for what to do next.

He had to stay in front and make sure the arrows did not hit Nfirea on the wagon. He also needed to figure out the enemy’s number and organization.

Verifying the opposition’s objectives was also important. At the moment, he could not surrender, but neither could he entirely deny the enemy’s proposition.

As though sensing Peter’s confusion, the two demihumans rose from the plains with a rustle.

“—Goblins,” Ninya breathed.

The demihumans who stood before them now were of the same species as the Goblins from yesterday. They had their bows raised, and their eyes were keen as they took aim.

Should they fight?

Ninya, Lukrut and Dyne looked at each other, pondering that question.

Goblins were inferior to human beings in height, weight, muscle power and other physical parameters. They were hard to deal with in the dark because they possessed darkvision, but under the light of day, they were hardly fearsome opponents for the veteran Swords of Darkness.

In addition, they had Ainz, who could take care of them easily like he had yesterday.

Peter was confident that they could make it through even a pincer attack, as long as their opponents were Goblins.

However, there was a reason why Peter could not immediately make that decision.

His adventurer’s instincts told him that these Goblins were different from the ones he had fought yesterday.

Simply put, the Goblins in front of him seemed trained and experienced. In addition, they were in good physical shape. In contrast to the scrawny, weak Goblins from yesterday, these Goblins had bodies of rippling muscle.

In addition, the Goblin archers had an excellent shooting stance. If the Goblins yesterday were children playing with sticks, these Goblins were warriors adept at using their bows.

Finally, their weapons were well-made and well-maintained, easily rivalling the weapons of the Swords of Darkness.

Just as humans could become strong through training, monsters could as well. Demihumans like Goblins could certainly do so too.

Therefore, it was quite possible that the Goblins before the Swords of Darkness were stronger than any demihuman foe they had ever fought.

Just then, a voice cut through the wind blowing over the wheatfields, and Lukrut hurriedly looked behind.

“...Hehe, you caught me, huh?”

A Goblin popped his head out from the fields and stuck his tongue out at them. He must have been trying to sneak up on them behind, but his stealth skills were not good enough to evade the senses of Lukrut the ranger. However, their situation was hardly improved even after discovering the Goblin infiltrator.

A calm look at their surroundings revealed movements throughout the wheat fields, as though something was hiding inside them. These movements were centered on the wagon, and slowly drew closer.

They were in a very bad situation.

The Swords of Darkness could not think of any way to break through their current difficulties.

♦♦♦

Ainz raised his hand to stop Narberal from killing them all. After examining the Goblins, he was certain that his guess was correct.

“They should be the Goblins summoned from the Horn of the Goblin General.”

If the girl who had received that horn was controlling these Goblins, then he had to avoid antagonizing them, as much as possible. If that was not the case they would have to think of something else. However, they were not enemies of Ainz and Narberal, so it should be fine.

The Goblin from before looked over to Ainz, who stood tall and steady, and said:

“We hope you don’t make any sudden moves, chap in the full plate. We don’t want to start a fight.”

The voice was stiff and full of caution as Ainz stopped Narberal from lashing out.

“Relax. If you don’t attack, neither will we.”

“Thanks for that. These nii-sans are strong, but they aren’t scary. You, however, are a different matter, and so is that nee-san beside you. When I think about the two of you as enemies, my hairs stand on end.”

Ainz did not reply, but shrugged.

“Then, please wait here for a bit before Ane-san arrives.”

“Who’s that Ane-san you’re talking about?! Did she take over Carne Village?!”

Nfirea’s agitation was reflected in the obvious surprise on the Goblins’ faces.

“Nfirea, calm down a little. It should be pretty obvious who has the advantage here. In addition, there’s a few more oddities about the village based on Nabe-san’s words. I’m hoping we can avoid pointless fighting before the truth comes out.”

Nfirea was hard-pressed to hide his anxiety despite Ninya’s words.

The look of immediate confrontation on his face became one of barely-restrained frustration. He clenched his fists tightly, and then slowly released them.

Ainz was surprised and confused by Nfirea’s intense reaction as well.

Granted, they had not travelled together for long, and he did not know the lad all that well. However, he did not think that Nfirea would be so excited about something like this. It was possible that this village was not just a simple place to gather herbs, but it had some other significance to him.

Ainz turned a doubting eye on Nfirea. On the other side, the Goblins seemed to have sensed Nfirea’s anger, and they looked at each other in confusion.

“Hm — this seems different from before…”

“Ane-san’s village was recently attacked by people dressed up as Imperial knights, we’re just staying on guard.”

“The village was attacked…! Is she all right?!”

As though in response to Nfirea’s shouts, a girl appeared at the entrance to the village, escorted by more goblins. As he saw the girl, Nfirea’s eyes went wide, and he shouted her name with all his strength:

“Enri!”

The girl heard the shout, and responded in turn. Her voice was gentle and filled with kindness, as though addressing a close friend.

“Nfirea!”

At this moment, Ainz recalled what he had heard earlier.

“Ah… it would seem that her herbalist friend was not a woman, but a man.”

Intermission

Demiurge walked through the 9th floor of the Great Tomb of Nazarick. The hard soles of his leather shoes clacked loudly against the ground, and the echoes faded away into silence. Many vassals had been set out to maintain security, but they did not impair the mythic atmosphere in this place.

Suddenly, Demiurge looked around, and smiled.

“...Truly magnificent.”

The object of his admiration was the entirety of the 9th floor. It was a place which complemented the 41 Supreme Beings, the entities for whom Demiurge would abandon everything and pledge his utmost loyalty. Therefore, Demiurge loved and cherished everything here.

Joy filled Demiurge's heart every time he walked through this place, further reinforcing his devotion to his creators. It was not just Demiurge who felt this way; even the clowns, musicians, and other noisy fellows were awed into silence by this floor, and strove to preserve its quiescence.

Anyone who was not delighted by the sights here, who was not sufficiently loyal to the 41 Supreme Beings, must surely have "disloyal tendencies".

As these thoughts passed through Demiurge's mind, he turned a corner. His destination was before his eyes, the room of his unquestionable superior, the supreme ruler of Nazarick, the last and only one who remained with them, Ainz Ooal Gown.

As he approached the room's door, he saw several people open it and leave.

These people noticed Demiurge, and waited courteously for him to approach.

One of them was dressed like a butler, but he was dressed entirely in black aside from his white gloves. It looked less like a set of butler's clothes than a combat uniform.

He was one of the ten manservants of Nazarick, but not even Demiurge could tell which of the ten he was. This was because they all wore full-face battle masks, like faceless mooks, and only communicated in strange noises.

In addition, there was the being standing before the butler.

The ridiculous mental image of a naked man in a tie appeared in

Demiurge's mind.

It was a penguin.

It was the very picture of a penguin, and it wore a black tie.

"It has been a while, Assistant Head Butler-kun."

Upon hearing Demiurge's warm and genial greeting, the penguin responded with a beaming smile (probably):

"Indeed, it has been a while, Demiurge-sama."

He then bowed deeply.

This was not a simple penguin, but the assistant head butler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick. He was a heteromorphic being known as a birdman, and its name was Eclair Aicler Egglayer.

As a birdman, like Peroroncino of the 41 Supreme Beings, he should have had a bestial head and wings, and his limbs should have had avian characteristics. Yet for some reason, he looked like a penguin. Still, Demiurge had no doubts about his appearance.

The reason for that was because he was a creation and relic of the Supreme Beings.

"Is Albedo inside?"

"Yes, Albedo-sama is within."

Albedo was in charge of Nazarick while Ainz was out. It was also common knowledge that she did not conduct her business in her own room, but in this room.

All her actions were taken with Ainz's approval, so the only one to voice any objections to this arrangement was Shalltear Bloodfallen, who was herself abroad on business.

Demiurge had once whispered to Albedo: “Shouldn’t a good wife wait for her husband at home and mind the house in his absence?” Therefore, he was completely unable to refute her when she replied, “What’s wrong with a wife standing watch over her husband’s room?”

He nodded to Eclair, and then asked:

“It’s rare for you to come here, Eclair-kun. Are you not assigned to the guest rooms?”

“I must work hard in Sebas-sama’s place when he is not around. In fact, I was discussing the finer points of my duties with Albedo-sama.”

“Indeed. Since he is not around, the 9th floor of the Great Tomb of Nazarick is now your responsibility.”

“Exactly. I must work hard now, so I may one day rule the Great Tomb of Nazarick.”

The smile on Demiurge’s face did not change, despite Eclair’s strange statement.

It was widely-known that Eclair hungered after the throne of the Great Tomb of Nazarick. He was a creation of the Supreme Beings, so he was beyond question.

Of course, if the order was given, Demiurge would eliminate him without mercy, but until then, he had no objections.

“Indeed. Work hard, then. Speaking of which, what do you intend to take care of first?”

“Cleaning, of course. What other work is there to do? Nobody cleans better than me! One could eat off the toilets I clean.”

Demiurge nodded in satisfaction as he heard Eclair’s confident reply.

“Excellent. Your work is very important. A stain on this floor is an insult to the Supreme Beings.”

The nodding Demiurge then asked another question:

“I know your job is very important, but who will be in charge of this floor while Sebas is out?”

“That would be the head maid Pestonya. Managing this floor is nothing compared to cleaning it.”

“I see… so the vassals made by the Supreme Beings have already been assigned their duties… come to think of it, is it not difficult to carry out your duties with these penguin hands of yours?”

“My talent lies in overcoming the clumsiness of these hands and cleaning house,” Eclair confidently replied, his chest puffed out. Then, in a somewhat unhappy tone, he continued:

“Come to think of it, this is not something that a being like you -- whose wisdom is second only to my own -- would say, Demiurge-sama.”

Eclair took a comb from the butler behind him, and began preening the golden feathers on the sides of his head.

“I am no mere penguin, but a rockhopper penguin made by Ankoro Mochimochi-sama of the Supreme Beings. Please do not confuse me with such animals. Also, these are not my hands -- but wings.”

“It seems I have been rude.”

After seeing Demiurge lower his head in apology, Eclair signalled that he had not taken it to heart. Then, he ordered the butler behind him:

“Carry me.”

“Ngiiiiiih--!”

The manservant tucked Eclair under his arm.

Eclair’s usual walking gait was a series of short hops, which was quite slow, in some ways.

Therefore, he was typically carried around by a manservant in this manner.

“Then, I shall take my leave, Demiurge-sama.”

“Mm, farewell. Eclair-kun.”

After looking briefly at the Assistant Head Butler being held under a manservant’s arm like a doll, Demiurge knocked gently on the room’s door:

“This is Demiurge. Pardon the intrusion.”

He was exceedingly polite, despite the absence of the room’s owner. This was because to Demiurge, the room itself was a place to be respected.

Demiurge entered the room, which should have been empty.

He looked around, and did not see Albedo anywhere. Demiurge sighed softly, then opened another set of doors and proceeded deeper within.

The rooms of the 41 Supreme Beings were modelled after royal suites, and featured a vast bathroom, a bar counter, a living room with a grand piano, a main bedroom, guest rooms, a dedicated kitchen, a dressing room, and so on.

Demiurge advanced to the bedroom without a second’s hesitation.

He knocked on the door and entered without waiting for an answer.

There was only a single bed within, but the king-sized bed was adorned with a stylish canopy. There was a large lump, slightly larger than the size of a human, and it was squirming.

“Albedo.”

Unable to bear Demiurge calling out to her, a world-class beauty revealed her face from under the sheets. Her skin was an uninterrupted stretch of silky smoothness down to her shoulders, so she was probably naked under those sheets. Perhaps it was because she had burrowed into those sheets, but there was a faint blush of arousal on her cheeks.

“...What fell sorcery are you working there?”

“I want Ainz-sama to be enveloped in my fragrance when he returns.”

It would seem her wiggling and squirming was to mark her territory.

Demiurge was dumbstruck. All he could do was silently watch the highest-ranked NPC created by the 41 Supreme Beings, the Guardian Overseer of the Great Tomb of Nazarick. Then, he tiredly shook his head.

He did not say, “Ainz-sama is undead, he probably will not sleep on a bed” or “Even if he did sleep on a bed, the sheets would probably be changed right away” or something like that. If she was satisfied with that, then so be it.

“You should probably not take it too far.”

“...I don’t know what you mean by too far, but I understand. Right, Ainz-sama?”

The person lying in bed beside Albedo suddenly revealed his face.

Demiurge was so shocked that he had no words to say.

For a moment, he thought it was Ainz Ooal Gown himself, but it was not nearly thick or imposing enough.

“That must be… a hug pillow… who made it?”

“I did.”

Demiurge’s nearly-closed eyes widened slightly as he heard Albedo’s prompt reply. He had not expected her to be possessed of such skills.

“Be it cleaning, washing clothes or sewing, I possess all these skills at a professional level.”

Elated by Demiurge’s surprise, Albedo continued showing off in a self-satisfied tone:

“I’ve already made socks and clothes for our future baby, up till the age of five.”

Albedo’s full-faced smile and her *kufufufu* laugh left Demiurge feeling a little powerless. He considered simply leaving her here and departing forthwith.

“It doesn’t matter if it’s a boy or a girl… ah! What if the child is a hermaphrodite, or sexless?”

Demiurge could not say anything. All he could do was watch Albedo, who was muttering to herself.

It was true that Albedo excelled in the management of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, and in that respect she was far superior to Demiurge. However, she was not as talented in terms of defense and military administration, so she needed Demiurge’s help in that field.

All would be well as long as there were no known enemies, like now.

With that in mind, Demiurge tamped down his uneasiness. His master had ordered him to leave the Tomb, and Demiurge could not resist that command.

“Then, in accordance with Ainz-sama’s orders, I will be setting out now. That being the case, the only Guardians remaining in Nazarick will be yourself and Cocytus. There is nothing which needs to be said, but I do hope you will take care of yourself.”

“So, after Aura, Mare, Sebas and Shalltear, it’s your turn? Mm, leave it to me. I’ll have my sisters help me in an emergency. I will also mobilize the Pleiades. They should be enough to hold on until everyone returns.”

“...I believe that your little sister cannot be deployed without Ainz-sama’s permission, even in an emergency. The same applies to the Pleiades. I believe two of them are already out on missions, so you will not be able to assemble all of them. Perhaps you should move Victim to a higher floor, depending on the circumstances?”

“Still, going that far… preparations have been made in case of such a situation. If something goes awry, please return as soon as possible. Speaking of which, how will you deal with the surviving members of the Sunlight Scripture? Ainz-sama has granted you the right to dispose of them, am I wrong? You could hand that to me as well, but I have no idea what you plan to accomplish with them…”

“Ah, them, you mean? By order of Ainz-sama, they are helping us with experiments.”

Demiurge seemed very happy, but Albedo wrinkled her elegantly-shaped eyebrows.

“First are the healing magic tests. When we cut off an arm and heal the wound with magic, the severed hand disappears. Now, if we had them eat the severed arm and then healed the wound, would the nutrients derived from the arm vanish? If we repeated this over and over again, would the people who ate the arms starve to death?”

“Ah — indeed.”

“In addition, we allow them to vote on who should become the others’ food, and who should be the one to cut off the food’s limbs with a blunt axe. We do so by a registered vote.”

“Is there a reason for that?”

“But of course. There will be a hierarchy among the prisoners, from those who will become food and have their limbs chopped off, to those who will chop the limbs off, and those who will eat those limbs. This creates hatred, and once they are gripped by that hatred, all we need to do is gently urge on the ones who were used as food. This encourages them to revolt, and the effects are very obvious. Beings that hate everything are truly fearsome.”

“...That is quite disturbing. We of Nazarick are beings created by the

Supreme Beings, and there is no way we could betray Ainz-sama. But to think these humans would betray their own masters… well, they have hardly any loyalty to speak of.”

“That is what makes it interesting. You could enjoy the humans in that way too, could you not, Albedo? All you need to do is treat them as toys.”

“I cannot understand your way of thinking.”

“What a shame. All right, staying here and chatting will delay the execution of Ainz-sama’s orders. If anything happens, let me know and I will return right away.”

“Mm. I don’t think it’ll come to that, but I will inform you depending on the circumstances.”

Albedo’s alabaster-white hand emerged from under the sheets to wave Demiurge goodbye.

“Then, I will be off. Right… since you wanted to make boys’ clothes, you might want to know this. Did you know that the Supreme Beings seem to prefer boys in girl’s clothing?”

“...Hm?”

Overlord Volume 2 Chapter 3

Wise King of the Forest

OVERLORD 「2」 The dark warrior
3章 森の賢王

Translator: Nigel
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Part 1

Clementine stormed back to Khazit's hideout — the secret shrine under E-Rantel's graveyard. Her strides were wild and forceful, her brows were furrowed, and her mouth was twisted. Her pretty features were distorted into something which could only have been described with the word "ugly".
That said, her true nature was probably more grotesque than that face.

Khazit muttered to himself as he guided a newly-created Zombie over to the undead storage area.

"Oh~ A new Zombie? That's over 150 now, the Orb of Death is quite extraordinary~"

The number of undead that could be controlled by the 3rd-tier spell [Create Undead] was limited by the power of the spell's caster. The more undead one made, the fewer one could control. Still, Zombies were among the lowest grade of undead. Someone like Khazit, who was specialized in controlling the undead, could maintain his hold over the unbelievable amount of over a hundred of them at once. The reason Khazit could control more than even that number was due to the power of the item he carried — the Orb of Death.

"It's all because you've been fooling around so much."
"Sor-ry~"
There was not even the slightest hint of remorse on Clementine's face as she apologized.
"Still~ it's their fault for dying so soon~ couldn't they hold on a little longer—?"
"…When you bash them like that, it's no wonder they'd die…"
"Adventurers wouldn't die so easily~"
"They weren't adventurers, just ordinary civilians… Clementine, do you like spouting obvious things to waste time?"
"Yesyesyes~ I'm sorry, it won't happen again, please forgive me~"
Khazit clicked his tongue.
"As if I could believe that. In any case, stop going after people."

“Oh-kay~”
Her flighty response made Khazit furrow his brows. Still, there was no point going on about it, so he decided not to continue lecturing her. He tried to express his displeasure with the wrinkles of his frown, but as expected, she ignored it.
“Buuut~ I’m so booooooored — speaking of which, where is he, anyway?”

“Has he not returned yet?”

“Not yet. I missed him — since it’s hard to get a hold of him, what about grabbing that granny instead~?”

“Stop that. That old woman is a 3rd-tier magic caster and a famous person in this city, so don’t look down on her. If you move carelessly against her, you might find yourself in too deep to dig yourself out.”

“Ehhhhh~ But—”

Khazit reached into his robes, and withdrew a jet-black gemstone.

“…Clementine, I’ve spent several years preparing to turn this place into a city of the dead. I don’t want your pointless antics to set my plans back. If you continue making trouble… I’ll kill you.”

“…It’s called the Death Spiral, right?”

“Indeed. It’s the rite our leader is conducting.”

In places where the undead gathered, more powerful undead were born. When these more powerful undead gathered, even more powerful undead would appear. The magic rite which made use of this property was like a spiral, constantly spawning ever more powerful undead beings. It was potent enough to destroy an entire city, so it was known as the “Death Spiral”.

This wicked ritual had been conducted in the past, and it had turned a metropolis into a city of the dead where the undead roamed free.

Khazit's aim was to turn E-Rantel into another such dead city. He would turn himself into an undead being by harnessing the necromantic energies from such a place.

He had made extensive preparations to achieve his aim. He would not let this woman who had showed up just a few days ago ruin his plans.

"Got it?"
Khazit saw through Clementine's adorably puffed-up cheeks. Her expression was one of cruel malice. In that moment, Clementine surged forward like a killing storm.
She closed the distance between them in an instant, and struck like lightning. The sharp blade in her hand gleamed lethally as it flashed toward Khazit's throat —

♦♦♦

The small blade Clementine thrust forth was a piercing weapon known as a stiletto.
There was little variation in the ways one could attack with a piercing weapon, so they were not easy to use. However, Clementine favored such weapons, and she had trained her body ceaselessly, selected the best equipment, and learned the right martial arts, all in order to kill in a single blow.
This technique of hers, honed and refined through countless battles with humans and monsters, was on a level where no normal person could defend against it.
Clementine was naturally gifted with physical abilities which exceeded those of normal human beings. On top of that, she had spent her life training and practicing her combat skills, so it was only natural that she should be able to fight at such a level.
However, her target was not a normal person.

Khazit — one of the 12 high disciples who were the pride of Zuranon — could not be killed so easily.

♦♦♦

— And a wall-like white object which erupted from the ground and intercepted the unavoidable, razor-sharp blade. It was a gigantic hand made of countless human bones, covered in hooks which called to mind the image of maggots.
The hooks writhed, and the earth around them shattered. Under Khazit's mental control, a giant creature began revealing itself.
She could sense a powerful undead creature beneath Khazit's feet.
The smug Khazit turned toward Clementine and said:
"What a waste of time. Because of you, I was distracted for a moment and lost control of the other undead."
"Tehe~ Sorry 'bout that~ But I wasn't going all out either. You had to pull out all the stops to barely block it, right?"

"That's nonsense and you know it, Clementine. You're not the sort to hold back."

"Uwah~ you saw through me~ Mm, if you hadn't blocked it, your shoulder would have been stabbed through. Butbut, I never intended to kill you — Really~"

Khazit frowned again as he saw the hateful smile on the woman before him.

"Still, if it was me, I could beat that chap — maybe magic casters couldn't win, but as a warrior, I could defeat it handily. I'm just not too used to bludgeoning-type weapons—"

"…Your specialization in one-hit kills might make you strong against the living, but what will you do against the undead which lack biological processes? And do you really think 'that chap' is the last card I have to play?"

“Mmm~ that’s also true~”

Clementine glanced toward the entrance. She seemed to have noticed the undead controlled by Khazit, who were waiting there for his orders.

“I think I could win… but if I draw out the fight I’ll probably lose~ Tehe~, sorry, Khazi-chan.”

Clementine returned her stilettos under her cloak, and the rumbling from the earth ceased.

“Buuuut~ that’s a specialized undead controller for you~ Well done!”

With that, Clementine turned and left.

“Ah, yes, yes, I won’t touch that granny until the end. I won’t go hunting people either. That should be okay, right?”

“…Mm.”

Khazit did not release the power he was holding until Clementine left. He continued holding on to it even after her shadow was gone from his underground shrine.

“What a bad personality,” Khazit spat.

He had his own flaws, but he was not nearly as bad as Clementine.

“Even though she’s so skilled… no, it’s because she’s so skilled that she’s so twisted.”

Clementine was strong, and even among the 12 executives of the secret society Zuranon, only three of them could beat her. Sadly, Khazit was not one of them. Even with the magic item in his hand, he only had around a 30% chance of success.

“The former 9th Seat of the Black Scripture… deranged individuals with the power of heroes are hard to deal with.”

♦♦♦

“So that’s what happened.”

Nfirea sighed deeply, and mumbled to himself.

Nfirea had been close to Enri’s parents. They were great parents, and one might even envy the amount of love they lavished on their daughters. Nfirea had lost his parents at a young age and only had murky impressions of them. Therefore, when he thought of an outstanding father and mother, Nfirea immediately thought of Enri’s parents.

He was filled with rage when he heard that her parents had been killed by the Imperial knight impostors, and all he could think when he learned that they had been slaughtered in turn was “serves them right”. He was also somewhat angry at the higher-ups in E-Rantel, who refused to send soldiers over.

However, he felt something was wrong about him displaying this anger, when Enri — for whom that anger was far more justified — had set those feelings aside.

He looked at Enri, her eyes brimming with tears. As he wondered whether he should try to comfort her, Enri wiped her tears away and smiled:

“I still have a little sister. I can’t lose myself in sadness forever.”

Nfirea was halfway off his chair, and now he sat down again. Having lost the chance to console her, he felt like he had wasted an opportunity and was ashamed of his own uselessness.

Even so — his desire to protect her had not changed. After a brief pause, Nfirea made up his mind. He would not let anyone other than himself sit beside Enri, even if that person was a powerful being who could protect her.

He felt a little anxious, but while he was riding on this surge of emotion, Nfirea decided that he would share the feelings he had had ever since he came to this village for the first time, as a child.

“Then—”

His throat seemed to have clamped shut. *Come on, say it!* Although he desperately wanted to speak, the words stuck in his throat and refused to leave.

Both Enri and Nfirea were at an age where it would not be unusual for them to be married. In addition, due to his income as a herbalist, Nfirea had enough money to support Enri and her little sister.

I could probably provide for a child too…

The image of the family he wanted to make appeared in his mind — but he immediately waved away his runaway imagination. The knowledge that Enri was looking at him in surprise made him even more nervous.

His mouth opened, and then closed.

I like you.

I love you.

But the words refused to leave his lips, because he was afraid of hearing her reject him.

Then, what else could he say to shorten the distance between them?

The city's safer, do you want to live with me? I'll take care of you and your little sister. If you want to work, you can help in Granny's shop.

If you feel uneasy about the city, I'll do my best to help you.

He should say that. The chances of those words being rejected would be a lot lower than a confession of love.

"Enri!"

"Wh-what happened, Nfirea?"

Enri jumped as Nfirea loudly called her name. He began to speak:

"—If, if, if you've got any problems, let me know. I'll do whatever I can to help you!"

"Thank you… You're such a good *friend* that it's almost wasted on me, Nfirea!"

"Ah, ah, er… it, it's fine, we've known each other for so long, after all."

Nfirea was unable to say anything else in the face of Enri's beaming smile. He cursed himself for his uselessness, but at the same time he fondly reflected on how cute Enri was, and of the times he had spent talking with her.

Just as it seemed the matter was at an end, Nfirea asked a question:
"Come to think of it, what's up with those Goblins?"

Those Goblins called Enri their “Ane-san”. In addition, those Goblins all looked like the ones they had encountered on the road to Carne; they had the air of veteran warriors. It was even more surprising to see a magic caster in the village. When and where had these Goblins encountered a simple village girl like Enri, and what sort of relationship did she have with them?

Enri simply replied:

“They appeared after I used a magic item given to us by our village’s savior, Ainz Ooal Gown. They follow my orders.”

“I see…”

Enri’s eyes were like twin sparkling stars as she said that name. It made Nfirea feel bitter inside.

Ainz Ooal Gown.

Enri had already mentioned this name several times since they started talking.

When Carne Village was attacked by mysterious men dressed as Imperial knights, a magic caster who was passing by saved the village with his tremendous might, returning peace to the village. He was Enri’s savior, and someone that Nfirea should have thanked. However, the look on Enri’s face made it difficult for him to thank him in earnest.

He could understand how Enri felt when she mentioned her messiah, but at the same time, jealousy welled up at the bottom of his heart. He was filled with his one-sided love for Enri, and by his competitive spirit as a man. Influenced by these emotions, his emotions turned ugly.

Nfirea thrust these feelings aside, and turned his thoughts to the magic item of which Enri had spoken.

It was a magic item which summoned Goblins, called the “Horn of the Goblin Whatever”.

The magic caster who had saved her village had explained what sort of horn it was, but because her mind was too confused back then, her memory was hazy.

Nfirea felt it was a little strange.

He had no idea what sort of magic item it was, but she should not have forgotten about it. Nobody should have forgotten the details of a magic item with special abilities once they were told about them. Still, there were many magic items which could summon creatures, just as there were many summoning spells in magic. Any monsters summoned with those spells would vanish after a while.

Summoned monsters were not creatures which could persist for a long time.

If that item could do that, it might well overturn all of magical history and theory to date.

How valuable was a magic item which could accomplish such a feat? Enri did not seem to have realized its value, but if she sold it, she could probably live comfortably for the rest of her life.

Enri had used this rare and precious item because she did not want blood to flow in the village once more.

Nfirea felt that this line of thinking was very much her style. Thus, the Goblins she had summoned called her Ane-san, followed her orders, and in addition to protecting the village they even helped in the fields. Apparently, they were even teaching the villagers how to use bows, and how to defend themselves. As a result, the village had gained several odd new residents.

Part of the reason why the village could accept the Goblins was because the knights who had attacked the villagers had been human beings like them. This had made them distrust human beings, and thus they could more easily accept the Goblins' help. Another big reason was because the one who bestowed this item on them was the magic caster that had saved the village.

“So, he was called Ainz Ooal Gown? What sort of man is he like? I'd like to thank him myself.”

Nfirea knew nothing about the name Ainz Ooal Gown. Besides, Enri had not seen his face under his mask, so she had no idea who he was either. Still, anyone who could casually give away precious items like those horns had to be someone important. If she had seen his face, she would not have forgotten it easily. After he told her that line of reasoning, a look of disappointment appeared on her face.

“Is that so… I was thinking you would know him, Nfirea…”

Enri's reply made Nfirea's heart pound violently, and sweatdrops bloomed uncomfortably on his back.

…Looks aside, he'd be a hit just going by his strength alone.

The words from last night appeared in Nfirea's mind, and he began to pant and breathe heavily.

Forcing down the uneasiness in his heart, Nfirea asked:

"En-Enri, what, what will you do when you see that Gown fellow?"

"Hm? Mm, I'd like to thank him properly. The village came together with the idea of building a little copper statue for him because he saved us, and I need to show my gratitude too…"

After sensing that the answer did not contain any hints of affection which frightened him, Nfirea breathed a sigh of relief, and let his tensed shoulders relax.

"Ah. Is that so. Mm… hoo. Yes, of course you need to thank him. If you noticed any special features, or if he reminded you of someone, maybe it would narrow down the field… right, do you know what sort of magic he used?"

"Ah, magic, huh. It, it was really amazing. The was a flash of lightning and the knight went down in one hit."

"Lightning, huh… did you hear him say [Lightning] or something?"

Enri's eyes looked to the sky, and then she nodded deeply.

"Mm! …I think I heard him say that. Although it seemed like there was more to it than that…"

After hearing Enri trail off into mumbling, Nfirea concluded that this Gown fellow must have said something before casting his spell.

“If that’s the case… it should be magic of the 3rd tier.”

“…Magic of the 3rd tier… is that very amazing?”

“Of course it is! I can only use 2nd-tier magic myself. 3rd-tier of the magic is the limit for normal people. Only talent-holders can use magic beyond that.”

“I knew it! Gown-san is really amazing!”

Enri respectfully nodded. However, Nfirea did not think the magic caster called Ainz was limited to 3rd-tier spells. Given that he was a person who could nonchalantly give away those magic items, he might be able to use 5th-tier spells, which were the domain of heroes.

Why would such a great person come to a village like this?

A confused Nfirea tilted his head to the side, but then Enri dropped a bombshell which immediately blew all his doubts away.

“In addition, he gave me a red potion too—”

Nfirea recalled part of a conversation from earlier:

♦♦♦

“Then, what if I paid you, and you told me more about the person who gave you that potion?”

The warrior named Britta did not seem happy about that request:

“And why do you want to know?”

“Of course it’s to find clues to lead me to that mysterious man in full plate armor. If we get in his good graces, he might tell us where he got those potions from, right? He might let something slip by accident, so if he’s an adventurer, I want to hire him for a job. How about it, Nfirea?”

♦♦♦

That was the reason Nfirea had asked for Momon by name.

Nfirea’s plan was to winkle out information about the potion by deepening his friendship with Momon. In addition, if they went to pick herbs in the forest together, Momon might accidentally reveal something.

Nfirea tried to hide the excitement in his heart, and in the same calm voice from before he asked Enri:

“Hm, what kind of potion was it like?”

“Eh?”

“You know I’m a herbalist, of course I’d be interested in potions.”

“Ahhh, that’s right! Making these things is your job.”

Enri told Nfirea everything she knew about the magic caster and the potion he had given her. She mentioned the name Ainz Ooal Gown’s wondrous deeds several times during her account. The Nfirea from just now might have been filled with jealousy, but at the moment, his mind was pondering other matters.

He put all this information together, and after peeling back several layers of mystery, the hidden truth was revealed.

It was very likely that the potion which had appeared in E-Rantel and which Enri had drunk were one and the same. It was also apparent that a pair of adventurers had appeared in both those places, a magic caster and a warrior in black full plate.

There could only be one answer, yet there were two people who could be candidates for being Ainz Ooal Gown. From what Enri had said, he could conclude that Ainz was a man, but he decided to ask again just to be sure.

“…Could that Ainz Ooal Gown person be… a woman?”

“Eh? I don’t think so? I didn’t see his face, but his voice was a man’s.”

By itself, this was not proof that Ainz was a male. After all, there were spells and magic items which could change voices. It seemed strange to think that Nabe = Ainz Ooal Gown. The merciless and occasionally naive Nabe seemed completely different from the wise, benign and righteous Ainz. It was clearly too much of a stretch to think of her as Ainz.

“The person in the black full plate armor was called Albedo, I think.”

“Is, is that so…”

He remembered the name from when Nabe had said it.

The answer was clear.

Ainz Ooal Gown = Momon.

From that, he could draw a startling revelation.

The magic caster who had saved the village was also a fearsome warrior. Although there were some warriors with magical training, for the most part, one would cancel out the good points of the other. In a similar vein, arcane magic casters could not cast spells while wearing the heavy equipment which most warriors favored.

So he was a magic caster of the 3rd tier, as well as a swordsman on par with an adamantite-ranked adventurer.

This must be some kind of joke. If someone like that truly existed, he would be a hero among heroes.

Still, why had he asked so many questions on the road?

The most logical answer was that he was a magic caster who had learned his art in another country and was not sure about this one. That being the case, it made sense that he would possess potions from another land, whose means of manufacture was completely unknown.

After learning this piece of priceless information, his breathing became irregular, and he could not calm himself down even though he knew Enri was staring at him.

His heart was filled with complex emotions.

Ainz had saved Enri and given away potions. In comparison, Nfirea was a miserable little man who tried to get into Momon's good graces, in order to learn how he made those potions, and knowing this shamed him.

It was only natural that Enri would fall for someone like Momon.

As he thought about this, he could not help but sigh heavily.

“Are, are you all right? You don’t look too good.”

“Mm, mm. I’m okay, I was just thinking about something…”

Perhaps he could try to stave off his feelings of guilt by thinking that he wanted to learn the secret of that potion in order to save people. However, that hardly seemed convincing, given that he had wanted to learn how to make those potions in his capacity as a herbalist.

A mighty warrior who was also an excellent magic caster, accompanied by a beautiful woman, who possessed unknown potions, a righteous man that saved an innocent village girl from danger… and himself.

Nfirea considered the distance between himself and Ainz Ooal Gown — no, Momon, and fell into despair.

“What’s wrong? You seem strange…?”

“Ah, mm. It’s nothing.”

Nfirea suppressed a sigh and smiled weakly. However, he was not confident he could make it look natural, and Enri’s expression showed that she had seen through his fake smile.

“…What should I do? Enri, you don’t like people who hide things from you, right?”

“…Everyone has something they’d want to hide when brought before the gods, especially things which would hurt others if spoken. But it’s a different matter if hiding those things would hurt others… Nfirea, I won’t hate you for it, but if you’ve committed any crimes, you need to confess your sins to the magistrate!”

“…No, I did nothing wrong.”

“Yes… mm! Like I was saying! How could you do a bad thing, Nfirea? I believe in you!”

As he looked at the giggling Enri, Nfirea let the tension flow out of his shoulders.

“Mm, but still, thank you. For some strange reason, I feel the weight lifting off my shoulders. I’ll work hard to catch up with him.”

So that I can raise my head before you and say that I like you and that I love you.

Enri, who had no idea what Nfirea’s impassioned declaration and his previous words meant, simply smiled and nodded politely.

Part 2

“Hmm…”

Ainz looked over to a certain part of the village, sighing as he did.

There, he saw several villagers lined up in a row. There were men, women and children of all ages. He could see a motherly-looking 40 year old woman as well as teenagers. The one thing they had in common was the stern look on their faces, which might even be mistaken for hostility. It was a clear sign that nobody here was in the mood to play around.

A Goblin with a bow addressed the villagers.

Even Ainz's heightened sense of hearing could not make out his words over the great distance.

After a while, the line of villagers slowly raised their bows. They were simple, shabby shortbows which looked warped and were probably self-made.

After drawing their bows all the way back, they took aim at the strawmen some distance away.

The Goblin must have given an order, because the villagers loosed as one.

The bows looked crude, but the arrows they launched flew in beautiful trajectories. All of them struck the straw men, without a single miss.

"Not bad…"

Ainz could not help but praise them.

"Are they really that good?"

Narberal, standing behind Ainz, could not help but express her doubt.

In all likelihood, Narberal could not understand why their skills were praiseworthy. After all, they were like children at play compared to the archers of the Great Tomb of Nazarick.

As he realised what Narberal was thinking, a bitter smile bloomed on Ainz's illusionary face under his helmet.

“You're right, Narberal. Their technique is hardly something to get excited over. However, ten days ago, they did not even know how to use a bow. In order to prevent their spouses, children and parents from being slain once more, they threw themselves into training, so that they could one day stand with weapons in hand to fight. Is that not worthy of praise?”

What was truly praiseworthy was the depths of the villagers' hate, which had brought them this far.

“My, my deepest apologies. I had not thought that far.”

“It's fine. Don't worry about it so much, Nabe. It's true that their skills aren't really that impressive.”

Ainz watched as more arrows sailed through the air and penetrated the strawmen. An idea suddenly came to mind.

How strong could they become? How strong could he become?

Ainz had attained the maximum level in YGGDRASIL, level 100. When he came to the world, his excess XP bar was around 90% full. It was just a hunch, but since his other abilities were intact, the concept of levels should exist in this world as well. The question now was whether he could obtain that remaining 10% of the experience bar and reach level 101.

To some extent, he had an answer to this question.

He could not become stronger. This was as powerful as he was going to get.

Ainz's might was one which could no longer grow, but their weakness could be an unfathomable source of strength.

If there were no limits on the inhabitants of this world, if they could surpass the maximum level of 100 in YGGDRASIL, then Ainz and the vassals of the Great Tomb of Nazarick would not be able to defeat them.

And that would definitely—

"It's not impossible…"

Ainz felt it was possible that the Six Gods who appeared in the Slaine Theocracy 600 years ago were actually players. Although he did not know why they had appeared so far apart from Ainz, if they counted heteromorphic beings — which had no maximum lifespan — among their number or if they possessed classes which extended their lifespans, there was a very high chance that they had survived to the present day.

If the Six Gods were still hiding in the Slaine Theocracy, and if they had begun powerleveling others using the power of the Six Gods — i.e. helping them with the abilities of powerful players in order to gain experience faster than normal — from 600 years ago, it might well be possible that there were people in excess of level 100.

If that were the case, the reason why the Theocracy had not yet taken over the world might be because there were other beings of the same calibre lying in wait. It might even be the case that being level 100 meant nothing.

As he thought about that, Ainz's nonexistent gut began cramping up again.

If the Six Gods really were players, then he had to try and get on their good side while he lacked information about this world. According to the members of the Sunlight Scripture, the Imperial knights attacking this village were imposters from the Theocracy, which meant that saving this village was making an enemy of them.

“Was helping them a mistake…”

As he had surmised, gathering more information was a top priority.

Just as Ainz was absentmindedly pondering these matters, he noticed a teenager running over to him. The hair which normally obscured his eyes swayed from side to side, and he could see a pair of eyes fixed intently on himself.

Ainz immediately had a bad feeling about Nfirea. It looked like the same panic the village chief had from earlier.

“Why the rush? Did an emergency crop up again? This village is really…”

Nfirea reached the mumbling Ainz.

He was panting heavily and his forehead was slick with sweat. His hair, stuck to his skin by his perspiration, revealed a serious expression which was directed at Ainz and Narberal.

Nfirea seemed a little hesitant and unsure of whether to speak. In the end, he gathered up his determination and asked Ainz:

“Momon-san, are you Ainz Ooal Gown-san?”

The sudden question left Ainz dumbfounded. He should have denied it immediately.

But could he do that? It was a name made together with his friends. Now that he had used it as his own, could he deny it so easily?

This brief hesitation was an unspoken admission, and Nfirea continued:

“So it was you, Gown-san. Thank you for saving this village, as well as saving Enri.”

As Ainz looked on the bowing Nfirea, he quietly replied, “No… I…”

After hearing the words Ainz managed to squeeze out, Nfirea nodded in understanding.

“Yes. I understand why you might want to go by a different name, but still, I have to thank you for saving this village — for saving Enri, the girl whom I like.”

Ainz did not reply to the deeply bowing Nfirea. While part of him, the middle-aged uncle part, was musing that the words “the girl whom I like” were really a youthful thing, another part of him was reminiscing nostalgically about things past, and at the same time he thought about other, more important things.

“Ah… that’s enough… raise your head.”

This answer was a tacit admission that he was in fact Ainz Ooal Gown, but no matter how he tried to get out of this, there was no way he could deny Nfirea’s conclusion. This was a complete defeat for Ainz.

“Yes, Gown-san. The truth is… I’ve been hiding something from you.”

“…Come with me. Nabe, stay here and wait for instructions.”

After giving Narberal her orders, Ainz brought Nfirea to a place some distance away. This was to keep Narberal from overreacting if she heard something odd.

Once they had gone far enough away from Narberal, Ainz turned to face Nfirea.

“Actually…”

Nfirea swallowed nervously, but the look on his face was full of determination.

“Gown-san, the potion which you gave that lady in the inn cannot be made by normal methods and is extremely rare. I wanted to know what sort of person would have such a potion and what kind of methods would produce such a potion, which was why I requested this job. I am very sorry about that.”

“Ah, so that’s what it was.”

As he thought, it had been a mistake.

Ainz had given the healing potion to Enri in this village, and to someone else in E-Rantel. Because of that, his identity had been exposed. In addition—

…Maybe I should have taken back that potion. If I’d gotten that woman adventurer’s name as well it would have been fine… although, there’s no point regretting it now.

At the time, Ainz felt that giving her that potion was the best course of action.

That woman had said, “Well, seeing as you’re dressed in such a flashy suit of armor, surely you must have some healing potions, right?” Perhaps she had not thought about those words before speaking them, but the fact was that they greatly limited the ways in which Ainz could have responded.

For instance, one might see a person getting out of an expensive car. Upon seeing that person's opulent, almost decadent clothing and appearance, they would assume that the car matched their background. But what if that person dressed shabbily? People watching might then think that person had spent all their money on the car. They might even laugh at him.

Ainz wanted to avoid that sort of situation.

If he had refused on the spot, people might have become jealous of his beautiful companion Narberal, as well as his own full plate armor. They might even have begun spreading malicious rumors about him. Such rumors were a thing that followed one for life after they appeared, and people would bring them up constantly.

Ainz had come to E-Rantel to build his reputation as an adventurer. As a result, he had to avoid any actions which might damage his public image.

He had given her the potion after considering these factors.

It was a gamble which he had lost, but he did not lament it. This was not a fatal mistake, and all he needed to do was work hard to compensate for it. After all, Ainz was not a perfect being who could do no wrong.

Still, he did not know why Nfirea was apologizing.

“Is there anything to be sorry for?”

“Eh?”

“…Well, I can't say I feel entirely good about someone hiding something from me while smiling and shaking my hand, but then this assignment was designed to build a connection with me, am I correct? What’s wrong with that?”

A deeply puzzled Ainz asked this question from the bottom of his heart.

“Gown-san, you’re really a magnanimous person…”

Ainz had no idea why Nfirea was so impressed by him. Building connections was a basic element of living in society, so there was nothing wrong with what Nfirea had done. He was somewhat confused about the details, but he vaguely understood. Perhaps Nfirea thought that Ainz believed that Nfirea was drawing close to Ainz in order to steal industrial secrets.

“If I told you how to make the potion, what would you do with that knowledge?”

Nfirea gasped in surprise, and after a brief period of thought he answered:

“I had not thought that far ahead. I just wanted to know because I was curious… Granny’s probably the same way too.”

“I see. Then, there’s no problem. If you were planning to exploit it for criminal gain, it would be a different matter, but if not, then it’s fine.”

“You’re really amazing. No wonder… looks at you that way…”

As Nfirea murmured, the wind dried the sweat on his forehead, and his hair fell down to cover his eyes again. Still, Ainz could see a look of admiration in his eyes, like a boy meeting with his favorite baseball player.

Nfirea’s expression reminded Ainz of the look of surprise and immense gratitude on his own face, when his friends had saved him after he had been repeatedly PKed.

For a moment, he felt embarrassed, and then that emotion was damped down.

Ainz was surprised that Nfirea's attitude could affect his heart, but he immediately calmed himself down and moved on. First, he had to be sure of one thing.

"Speaking of which, are you the only one who knows that I am Ainz?"

"Yes, I didn't tell anyone else."

"Is that so, that's good."

Saying that, Ainz thought about how to continue speaking with Nfirea, but he had no idea where to begin. In the end, he decided to ask him directly.

"…Right now, I am simply Momon the adventurer. I would be glad if you could keep that in mind."

"Yes, I thought you'd say something like that. I'm sorry for causing you all this trouble, Momon-san, but I needed to thank you in person. Thank you very much for saving Enri and this village."

Nfirea delivered his earnest thanks with a sincere look in his eyes.

"There's no need to stand on ceremony. I was merely righting a wrong where I saw it."

"Even so, there shouldn't have been a need to give away those horns."

The truth was that there was no particular reason behind giving those horns away. However, if that was how Nfirea had interpreted the gift, then he would leave it at that. Ainz said nothing but merely nodded in a magnanimous way.

♦♦♦

In his capacity as an employer, Nfirea arranged with Ainz to head for the forest in an hour's time. After thanking him again, he turned and left.

As he watched Nfirea vanish into the distance, Narberal came and bowed before Ainz.

"Ainz-sama, my sincerest apologies!"

"People are watching, raise your head."

Once she had straightened up, Ainz continued in a barbed tone: "And you're not wrong to say that. All this was because you mentioned Albedo's name."

My exposure here had nothing to do with Albedo's name, but that was still a big mistake. Might as well scold her for it now and make sure she doesn't do it again. First, I should forbid her from calling me Ainz… though… I don't think anyone heard…

"Please allow me to atone with my life!"

That did not sound like a joke at all.

Everyone in the Great Tomb of Nazarick was like this. They considered the members of the guild Ainz Ooal Gown to be their absolute superiors. They took great pride in their loyalty — to the point of death — to these Supreme Beings.

Though it felt like a bit of a burden to Ainz, having his hand-crafted NPCs being loyal to him was not a bad thing. It might well be the fate of any creator.

Narberal was an NPC like that. If he jokingly ordered her to kill herself, she would immediately take her own life. The reason why she had asked for permission at all was because of her absolute loyalty to her master, to whom her life belonged.

“…Enough. Anyone can make mistakes. All you need to do is strive not to make the same mistake twice. Work hard, step by step, and do not repeat your past failures. I forgive you, Narberal Gamma.”

Narberal weighed the desire to pay for her mistakes with death against the loyalty compelling her to obey Ainz’s command not to die. After a while, the balance of her mental scales seemed to have tipped to one side.

Narberal slowly lowered her head.

“My deepest thanks! I will strive not to make the same mistake again!”

“…Well, don’t mind it too much. The name of Momon the adventurer — my undercover identity — was not completely compromised, so you just need to pay more attention in future. However… depending on the circumstances, we may need to eliminate Nfirea…”

“Shall I take care of him now?”

“Don’t be foolish. It would be troublesome if we messed up this assignment.”

Nfirea’s grandmother was a famous herbalist in E-Rantel. Annoying or making an enemy of her would make it more difficult for Ainz to reach his aims.

“In any case… we’ll see how it goes.”

That was all Ainz could think of for the moment.

HAPPY NEW YEAR!!

Part 3

There was a large clearing in the dense forest about 100 meters from the village. Although that clearing had been made by the villagers cutting down trees — under the protection of the Goblins — in order to make logs, it still looked like the gaping maw of some gigantic beast.

Ainz and the others made their final checks, and then the young man who had hired them spoke up:

“We’ll be entering the forest after this, so I’ll be counting on you to protect me. That said, the area just inside the forest is part of the Wise King of the Forest’s sphere of control, so under normal circumstances, the chances of meeting other monsters are very low. The problem is that the Ogres we met yesterday came from a place near the Wise King of the Forest’s territory, so something must have happened in the woods. Although it’s hardly something that I need to warn you gentlemen about, I hope everyone will remain on guard.”

Nfirea’s gaze rested briefly on Ainz.

The Swords of Darkness turned to look at Ainz as well.

“Well, with you around, we should be fine, Momon-san.”

“…If that monster called the Wise King of the Forest appears, let us hold it back. You should escape first.”

They could not help but gasp as they heard Ainz’s confident pronouncement. He seemed to shine even brighter in their eyes than after yesterday’s battle with the Ogres.

Ainz felt like something was wrong every time the people around him did that. This was a relic of rarely being praised in his past life. He envied the way Narberal could accept their awe so naturally with a smug look on her face.

“If there’s a need to run, could you please leave without delay? If the Wise King of the Forest is strong, I’ll need to face it with my full power, and I don’t want to get everyone caught up in it.”

“Understood. If that happens, we’ll protect Nfirea-san and flee the forest. But don’t push yourself too hard either, Momon-san.”

“Thank you. I’ll escape when it gets dangerous.”

“Then… Momon-san.”

Nfirea seemed to be wavering between speech and silence. In the end, he made up his mind and said:

“Could you not kill the Wise King of the Forest, but instead chase it away?”

“…Why is that?”

“Mm, Carne Village has not been attacked by monsters because the Wise King of the Forest’s territory is nearby. If you defeat the Wise King of the Forest…”

“I see…”

“That might be a bit much. Momon-san is strong, but his opponent is a legendary monster. Wouldn’t he be in trouble if he couldn’t defend himself with his full strength? How would he have the luxury of—”

“I understand.”

“Wha—!” Lukrut exclaimed in shock.

The other Swords of Darkness remained silent, but their surprise was written all over their faces.

“It might be difficult, but I’ll try to go easy on it and merely chase it away.”

Ainz’s reply, brimming with confidence, raised goosebumps on the skin of his fellow adventurers.

“Even if your opponent is… a legendary monster that’s lived for centuries…”

“Is this the sort of attitude that only the strong have…”

“Judging by Momon-san’s personality, he probably isn’t exaggerating or bluffing…”

In stark contrast to the Swords of Darkness, Nfirea had an idea of Ainz’s power, and he had a relieved expression on his face.

As he looked toward the young man, Ainz laughed in his heart.

Nfirea hoped that monsters would not attack Carne Village. That being the case, all Ainz needed to do was to have other monsters replace the Wise King of the Forest in enforcing its area of influence. That way he could still fulfil Nfirea’s wish.

Even if he ended up killing the Wise King of the Forest, all he had to do was dispatch vassals from Nazarick to replace him.

“All right! Now, let’s move on. The herbs I’m looking for this time look like this. If anyone finds them, let me know.”

Nfirea produced a sample of a withered plant from a herb-gathering pouch on his belly.

“Oh, it’s Ngenac grass!”

To Ainz, it looked like the nearby weeds. However, Dyne the druid was different, and he immediately named the plant.

Lukrut and Ninya nodded in response to hearing the name. They probably had some herbal knowledge themselves, and the name jogged their memories.

Just as he was hesitating over whether to pretend that he knew, everyone looked at Ainz.

“Momon-san, are you all right?”

“Eh? Ah, that plant? I’ve heard of it.”

Ainz calmly nodded in agreement.

If he were not undead, his voice might have become high-pitched from panic, but his helmet prevented others from seeing his expression, which also concealed his feelings. Ainz was sheathed in heavy armor and cut an imposing figure, but his heart was closer to that of a bunny.

“Yes, this herb is commonly used when making potions.”

“So it’s commonly found near adventurers!”

“Indeed it is. Now I see why we came to this place — I’ve heard that wild herbs are more potent than cultivated ones, no?”

“That’s right. Incidentally, the fact that we use all-natural ingredients in our potions is a point of pride for us! Well, they’re only about 10 percent more effective than those of the competition.”

“That 10 percent can be crucial to people who frequently put their lives on the line. To think you sell better potions for the same price…

as expected of the Bareare Apothecary, which built its reputation on selling high-quality potions.”

As he heard Nfirea and the Swords of Darkness discussing potions, Ainz fell into deep thought.

In YGGDRASIL, healing potions were usually made through skills that were only available through certain job classes, or by casting the desired spells on the appropriate ingredients. Although Ainz knew a little about this field, all he knew was that the ingredients were made by compounding specific substances with an alchemical solvent, but never through the use of herbs.

In other words, potions in this world were made in a different way from YGGDRASIL. This must have been what Nfirea meant by “cannot be made by normal methods”.

Ainz was convinced that mastering the potion-making techniques of this world would strengthen Nazarick. The question now was how to master them.

As he was thinking, the conversation seemed to have turned to the job once more, and Ainz turned to listen.

“There’s a clearing in the forest, which I’ve designated as our destination. I’ve already told you about that place, Lukrut-san, so please guide us there.”

After hearing Lukrut’s casual “Leave it to me,” Nfirea turned back to the others.

“Then, let’s begin the herb collection-”

“—I have a suggestion, actually.”

“Please tell us, Momon-san.”

“Since Nabe can cast something like the [Alarm] spell we used when pitching camp, could we temporarily split off when we reach the destination?”

Everyone, Nfirea included, wrinkled their brows. This was because they were uneasy about their strongest fighting force leaving them in such a dangerous area. However, Nfirea quickly replied:

“That’s fine. However, please don’t go for too long.”

“Of course. In order to avoid getting lost, I’ll tie a rope to myself. Tug on it if there’s anything.”

“Then, could I go too? I need to watch carefully in case you and Nabe-chan do something weird in the bushes.”

“Die, inferior lifeform (cockroach). Is lust the only thing left in your head? If I castrated you, would you still be able to move?”

“…That’s enough, Nabe. Lukrut-san, there’s no need to go that far. Although, I’d like to ask Ninya-san if there’s a spell which can tell you where members of your group are when you’re scattered in the forest. It would be convenient if such a magic existed.”

“I’ve never heard of such a spell. It *would* be very handy if it existed.”

Ainz nodded as he heard Ninya’s denial.

There’s a 6th-tier spell which can detect the location of specific objects. Do they lack knowledge in that field, or is it that there are spells which are unique to YGGDRASIL just as there are spells which are unique to this world?

Ainz put these thoughts aside for a moment and raised his chin to signal Narberal, indicating that she should get ready. Having received her orders, Narberal immediately began sizing up the Swords of Darkness.

“Then, Momon-san and Nabe-san will leave us for a while, and we’ll pick the herbs after they return.”

Since it was their employer’s decision, nobody else could object. The Swords of Darkness nodded one by one.

After the discussion and other matters were concluded, Nfirea called for them to move out. The group shouldered their baggage and entered the forest.

There were trees felled by the villagers nearby. The earth was already dried out. It looked like an easily walkable stretch of forest, but the scenery before their eyes slowly transformed into something like a green labyrinth.

There were no landmarks in the forest, and it was impossible to tell in which direction one was moving. A sense of unease filled everyone, as though they had been swallowed up. The sky-scraping trees further intensified that uneasiness, and most people would have been frightened by this scene. However, Ainz had an undead mind and felt no fear, apart from the vestiges of his human mind. He calmly praised the magnificent natural vista before him.

In YGGDRASIL’s forest and other natural zones, he considered these things to be simple in-game scenery. Even now, he still thought the same way.

Ainz — who was proud of the design of the Great Tomb of Nazarick — was filled with complex emotions. He had not expected that natural forest could be so awe-inspiring.

I see why Blue Planet-san liked nature so much…

He looked around as he surveyed the forest, but it was peaceful, and he saw no traces of any animals. Aside from the distant sound of birdsong, there was no sign of life here at all.

At the same time, he observed Lukrut the ranger advancing carefully, keeping a lookout with all his five senses. He seemed to have concluded that there was no living creature hiding nearby.

Actually, there's someone hiding behind us.

Ainz was proud of the person sneaking behind him.

The group — save for two people — was filled with tension as they walked silently through the forest, where the sun's light could not penetrate and which was surprisingly cool. They sweated heavily because the terrain was difficult and they were under no small amount of mental stress.

Finally, they reached a clearing that was roughly 50 meters across.

"We've arrived at our destination. We'll spread out from here and pick herbs."

Everyone began setting their gear down after they heard Nfirea unburdening himself of his baggage. However, they did not relax. Instead, they carefully observed their surroundings, ready to deal with any sudden developments.

This was because they were no longer in the world of men.

"Then, we'll move as we planned earlier."

After Nfirea replied to that statement in the affirmative, Ainz tied a rope to a nearby tree, then picked the other end up and headed into the forest.

The rope he was holding was not thick, but it was very strong. It would not snap just by being dragged along the ground. While holding the rope, Ainz and Narberal could move in a straight line into the forest.

Normally speaking, it was almost impossible to move in a straight line, since the trees would get in one’s way. However, the rope they were holding showed the path, and so the two of them could proceed despite their inexperience with the forest.

They moved about 50 meters into the forest, stopping when the rope had almost run out.

Trees and vegetation blocked the way behind them, so they did not worry about being spotted. There was someone nearby who could immediately deal with anybody who was following them, so there was no need to fret about that either.

“Here should be fine.”

“Yes.”

“Then, let’s discuss how to improve my reputation here.”

“…May I ask how you plan to do that? Does it involve finding a lot of the herbs they want?”

Ainz looked quietly at Narberal, and then shook his head:

“I plan to fight the Wise King of the Forest.”

Narberal seemed to have a question mark over her head, so Ainz explained further:

“My aim is to impress my might upon them in an easily understandable way.”

“…Was the battle with the Ogres not enough to convince them of your power?”

“…You’re not wrong to say that, but Goblins and Ogres are not enough. When they discuss my accomplishments back in town, there’s a world of difference between saying I slew an Ogre in one blow and saying I defeated the Wise King of the Forest. One of them will spread much faster and further than the other. This is why I need to put on a good show.”

“I see! As I thought, your plans take everything into consideration, Ainz-sama! Still, how will we find that Wise King of the Forest?”

“I’ve already planned for that.”

Just as Narberal was about to ask, a third speaker cut in.

“Yup~ that’s why I’m here.”

Narberal jerked her head over toward the source of the sudden voice. She even thrust her right hand out, preparing to aim and cast a spell. However, her face changed immediately upon seeing who the speaker was.

“Aura-sama! Please don’t scare me like that.”

“Sorry~”

A dark elf girl popped out from behind a nearby tree, with a beaming smile that seemed to say “ehehe” on her face.

This was one of the twin Guardians of the 6th floor of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, Aura Bella Fiora.

“May I ask when you arrived?”

“Hmm? I’ve been following behind you and Ainz-sama ever since you entered the forest.”

Aura was a beast tamer-cum-ranger, so tracking people in the forest was child’s play to her. While it was true that Lukrut was also a ranger, the difference in their abilities was so great that there was no way he could have spotted her.

“So, my job here is to find the monster called the Wise King of the Forest, then urge it to attack Ainz-sama.”

“That’s right. According to our previous intelligence, the Wise King of the Forest is a four-legged beast with silver fur and a snake-like tail. Does that remind you of anything?”

“Hm, it’s fine. It should be that guy,” Aura replied as she glanced upward.

“If that’s the case, do you want me to tame it directly?”

“…That is also an alternative, but let’s not.”

Aura the beast tamer should be able to easily subdue the Wise King of the Forest. However, it would be troublesome if someone found out that Ainz had been pulling all the strings. Therefore, it would be wiser to avoid having to worry about such things.

“By the way, Aura, how’s the progress on that matter I asked you to handle?”

“Yes!”

Aura swiftly genuflected before Ainz, in the manner of a vassal to her liege.

It did not quite seem like Aura’s style, but Ainz responded in kind, listening to her report in his capacity as her master.

“The order you gave me to ‘investigate and control the interior of the forest, verify if there are any lifeforms willing to obey Nazarick, and set up a resource storehouse’ is going well, Ainz-sama.”

“Is that so,” Ainz replied simply.

Before heading to E-Rantel, Ainz had handed down different orders to each Guardian. The reason he ordered Aura — and Mare — to scout the Great Forest was in order to ensure the safety of Nazarick and collect information.

As for the resource storehouse, it might be better to describe it as more of a shelter. The reason he ordered her to build it there was to provide a hiding place in case there was an emergency and he could not return to Nazarick. In addition, it would be best to have an alternate base of operations to avoid Nazarick’s location being revealed. And of course, it could be used to store all manner of supplies and resources.

He had ordered her to find creatures which would obey Nazarick because he wanted to see if he could powerlevel them. In addition, he wanted to learn about how one went about gaining levels in this world.

Because of this string of tasks, Aura, Mare, the vassals designated for construction, and other powerful entities had invaded the forest and disrupted the balance of power within it. This was why the Ogres and other monsters had chosen to flee, even at the risk of treading within the domain of the Wise King of the Forest.

“Still, the construction of the storehouse will take a long time to complete.”

“That can’t be helped. After all, it has only been a while since I gave you that order.”

While Aura had access to golems and undead from Nazarick, which could labor forever without needing to sleep or eat, this was not a task which could be easily finished, considering the amount of work that needed to be done.

“It’s all right if it takes extra time. Try your best to make it perfect. Make ample preparations for defense, so we won’t fall short if we’re attacked.”

“Yes! Understood!”

“Very well. Then, Aura, I’ll leave the matter of the Wise King of the Forest to you.”

“Yes!” Aura replied energetically as she stood back up.

♦♦♦

After Ainz bade Aura farewell, a gigantic black wolf with a lustrous black pelt padded out from behind one of the trees, as though it had been waiting for that moment. Its fiery red eyes blazed with intelligence, proving that it was no mere beast.

That was not all.

On the branches of another tree was a six-legged monster which looked like a fusion of a chameleon and an iguana. Its scaly skin ran through a kaleidoscopic array of lightning-fast color changes. It was as large as the wolf from earlier.

“Fen, Quadracile, what’s with you? Worried about me?”

The massive wolf called Fen whined and nuzzled Aura. Quadracile stuck out its tongue and lightly licked at the top of Aura’s head.

“Hey hey, we still have to do the work Ainz-sama gave us.”

Aura’s fighting strength was second from the bottom among the Guardians of Nazarick, and the fact was that some of the Area Guardians were stronger than her. However, that only took into consideration their solo abilities.

Aura’s forte did not lie in fighting as a lone unit, but as part of a group. Of the hundreds of monsters which Aura could summon, the highest level among them was 80. With the aid of Aura’s skills, they could reach level 90 or so. With these beasts at her command, her combat abilities far surpassed those of any other Guardian.

The two monsters here were two of Aura’s favorite high-level magical beasts — the Divine Beast Fenrir (also known as Fen), and the equally powerful Itzamna, Quadracile.

As they heard Aura’s words, Fen and Quadracile stopped playing around.

“All right, let’s go!”

Aura led the two magical beasts in a sprint through the forest. Even though they were surrounded by dense woodland, they were not impeded in the slightest, moving as fast as the wind.

After about 30 minutes of running, Aura reached her destination.

Aura smiled. It was a cold smile which did not fit her youthful face. It was equal parts innocent and cruel.

“I kind of wanted it for myself, but Ainz-sama did give me an order, so it can’t be helped.”

She did not sound like she was talking to her pets, but rather, like she was muttering to her jewellery.

Aura knew where the Wise King of the Forest made its lair because she had long wanted to subdue it for her own. The Wise King of the Forest was much weaker than Aura’s own monsters, so it had no value to her. However, it was an unfamiliar creature to Aura, and that inflamed her collector’s desire.

It was a shame to have to let it go, but if she was giving it up to her master, the Supreme Being to whom she owed all loyalty, then she had no complaints.

“Now then…”

Aura began transmuting the air molecules in her lungs. The newly recombined breath was not a natural substance, and it leaked from between her pink lips. This breath of hers could control emotions.

Normally, her breath only filled a very small radius around her, so it was more like a special type of passive skill. However, if she wanted, she could combine this technique with other targeting skills to hit any target within two kilometers with perfect accuracy, even in a forest like this.

However, there was no need for that. Because her objective was to remove any signs of her passing, she snuck up on her target. Not even her magical beasts, let along the natural animals of the forest, could detect Aura as she was now.

Aura proudly walked up to the Wise King of the Forest, all traces of her presence thoroughly erased, and breathed lightly. Her breath contained elements which induced terror, startling awake the sleeping Wise King of the Forest.

Every hair on the Wise King of the Forest stood on end, and it fled immediately. The speed of a terrified four-legged beast was startling. Yet Aura — who was chasing it from behind — was faster still.

Aura shadowed the Wise King of the Forest, harrying it towards Ainz, like she was a guided specter of Death.

“…Still, I wonder if I could take its pelt if it died…”

♦♦♦

There was a disturbance in the forest

Lukrut pricked up his ears as he sensed the change in the air. He surveyed his surroundings with a grim expression on his face and wariness in his heart.

“Something’s coming.”

When they heard this, the Swords of Darkness stopped their herb-gathering and drew their weapons in preparation for battle. Shortly after, Ainz tightened his grip on his greatswords as well.

“Is it the Wise King of the Forest?”

Nobody answered Nfirea’s uneasy question as he stuffed the herbs into his bags. Everyone merely watched the depths of the forest in silence.

“This is bad.”

Even the usually flighty Lukrut was speaking in a serious tone:

“Something massive is coming. I don’t know why it’s moving in a serpentine pattern, but from the sound of trampled grass, it should be here soon. However… can’t be sure if it’s the Wise King of the Forest.”

“Let’s fall back, it doesn’t matter if it’s the Wise King of the Forest or not, staying here is very dangerous. Even if it’s not the Wise King of the Forest, we’ve entered its territory, so the chances of it giving chase are very high.”

As he said this, Peter looked to Ainz.

“Momon-san, can we trouble you to be the rear guard?”

“No problem. Leave it to me… We’ll take care of the rest.”

The Swords of Darkness called out their encouragement to Ainz one after the other as they helped Nfirea retreat from of the forest.

“Momon-san, please don’t overdo it.”

Nfirea’s voice carried an absolute faith in Ainz, and his eyes glittered with admiration underneath his hair. It made Ainz feel deeply uncomfortable and he wished that they would leave quickly.

As he watched them disappear into the forest on the other side of the clearing, a twinge of unease ran through Ainz. He was not sure if he could leave the forest by himself, but then he immediately considered that he could let Aura guide him.

There was a more pressing problem before him at the moment—

“Damn… They might think it’s not the Wise King of the Forest… and even if I bring it back to Nazarick, I need some proof of having beaten it… Should I cut off one of its legs?”

“—Ainz-sama.”

Narberal’s gaze was far afield, looking at the mighty shadow that emerged from the distant trees. There was no way to make its shape out because it was hiding behind the trees, and without the sun to light it, there was no way to tell if its body was, in fact, silver.

“Has our guest arrived?”

Or maybe we’re the guests, Ainz idly mused as he stepped up in front of Narberal. He had no idea of how strong it was — what level it was, so Ainz made the logical decision of putting himself in front of the magic caster Narberal, who was not suited to melee combat.

Once he got in front of Narberal, Ainz felt the air move. He immediately crossed his greatswords in front of him like a shield.

He heard something like the sound of steel meeting steel, and a tremendous force bore down on Ainz’s arms. A weighty and swift object had struck the greatswords Ainz was holding.

He saw a long, serpentine tail slowly retreat behind a tree.

Its tail attacks like a bullwhip. However, judging by the feel and sound of the impact, that tail must be as hard as metal… its attack radius of over 20 meters will be hard to deal with, but how does it live with a tail like that?

With no frontliner skills, Ainz had no idea how to deal with it. All he could do was advance into melee with his foe.

Ainz sighed. Of course, this was just going through the motions, since Ainz had no lungs. He braced his shoulders into a battle-stance, ready to counterattack. In response to this, a serene bass voice boomed out from the forest:

“How spectacular; to think thou could endure the blow of this one. Perhaps this is the first time this one hath encountered a foe possessed of such prowess.”

"Thou…this one…"

Ainz's illusory face hardened, and then he considered that those words had already been translated. Ainz decided that this was the closest equivalent to what had actually been said.

"Then, oh trespasser upon mine demesne. Shouldst thou decide to quit the field, this one shall not pursue thee, in honor of thine magnificent defense… what say thee?"

"…What a foolish question. Of course I plan to defeat you for my own gain… speaking of which, are you so insecure about your appearance that you have to hide in the shadows? Or are you shy by nature?"

"…What a wild tongue thou hast, oh trespasser! Now behold this one's mighty form! Stare with eyes wide and tongue tied, and tremble in dread and awe!"

The Wise King of the Forest slowly emerged from the trees, revealing its body to him.

As he saw it, Ainz's illusionary eyes went wide.

"Fufufu, this one senses thy fear and alarm from beneath thine helmet!"

A smile twisted the face of the magical beast, and it curled its long tail. There were strange glyphs and symbols on the silvery fur covering its body. It was about the size of a horse, but it was low to the ground, being larger in the horizontal rather than the vertical dimension.

The Wise King of the Forest shrank the distance between them.

"What is this…"

An indescribable feeling washed over Ainz. After becoming undead, all the strong emotions he felt were immediately suppressed. With that in mind, this was probably not a very strong emotion. Even so, he had not felt this a long time — including his time in YGGDRASIL — the sensation when a monster appeared before him.

“…I have a question; what is the name of your species?”

“This one is known in thy tongue as the Wise King of the Forest. Apart from that, this one holds no other titles.”

Ainz gulped, and then asked further:

“Your species… might they be called Djungarian Hamsters?”

The Wise King of the Forest.

From what Ainz could see, it closely resembled a Djungarian Hamster. Its fur was silvery, or rather, snow-white, contrasted by its black, round eyes, and its body looked like a gigantic bun.

Of course, hamsters did not have such long tails, not did they grow larger than a human being. However, those two factors aside, he honestly could not think of any other animal which could compare. Fully a hundred out of a hundred people would agree that it was a hamster. Well, a giant Djungarian Hamster. Maybe a mutant Djungarian Hamster, or something like that?

It tilted its adorable head — it did not seem to have a neck — and the Wise King of the Forest sniffed at the air before speaking again:

“This… this one hath lived in solitude all mine life. This one canst not answer thee, for this one knowst not of this one’s… or dost thou imply that thou knowst of this one’s species?”

"Um… er… I guess, sort of… one of my former friends once kept a creature which was similar to you…"

Ainz recalled that friend of his, and how that friend had not logged onto YGGDRASIL for about a week because that friend's pet Djungarian Hamster had died.

Behind him, Narberal quietly went "Ohhhh," probably because she had learned something about one of the 41 Supreme Beings.

"What?! To think beings like this one would be raised as pets!"

The Wise King of the Forest puffed up its cheeks.

Ainz had no idea whether it was unhappy or trying to intimidate him, or something else. The only thing Ainz could be sure of was that it was definitely not eating.

"Hm… This one prays thee enlighten me on that matter. This one is a living being and must procreate. If others of this one's breed exist, then this one must go forth and multiply, lest this one become a failure as a living being."

According to the Wise King of the Forest's logic, Ainz — who could not reproduce — was unfit to be a living being. As he clung to the excuse that he was undead and not, in fact, a living creature, Ainz weakly answered:

"…Er, it wasn't as big as you, anyway."

"Be that as it may… perchance it was a juvenile?"

"…No, even fully grown, it was small enough to fit in the palm of my hand."

With a vague sense of sadness, the Wise King of the Forest's whiskers drooped down.

“Indeed, that is quite a stretch… this one must pass the years in solitude, after all…”

“…If you were a more impressive-looking species it wouldn’t be so bad… but you’re a hamster. I do sympathize with your circumstances, but if there were others like you, your numbers would increase without end and the world might end up being destroyed…”

The Wise King of the Forest twitched its whiskers. While its eyes were the same shiny black as always, there seemed to be some anger in its tone:

“What an outrage! Increasing the numbers of one’s species is important! And this one hath lived without companionship all mine life! ‘Tis only natural to desire others of mine kind!”

“Oh… um… well, that’s certainly true… forgive me, I misspoke…”

Ainz recalled his comrades from Ainz Ooal Gown and apologized. Although, he felt terribly mixed up about remembering his friends after being lectured by a hamster and then apologizing to it.

“…Think naught of it. This one grants thee mine forgiveness. Then, let us abandon this idle banter and show each other our fatal resolve. Listen well… oh trespasser who hath profaned mine demesne, offer thy life as this one’s sustenance!”

“Er… um…”

Ainz felt his motivation draining away.

Even if that cute appearance was just a facade, he still could not bring himself to fight it in earnest. No matter how you looked at it, having the ruler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick duel a giant hamster was just sad.

Even if he defeated it, he would have to take the corpse of a Djungarian Hamster and tell people, “This is the Wise King of the Forest, the fight was too intense and I couldn’t chase it away”. How would adventurers — including the Swords of Darkness — view that? Even in the best case scenario, they would simply look silently at Ainz with pitying eyes.

In that case, he would not defeat the Wise King of the Forest, but capture it alive to pick its brains.

“Nabe, fall back,” Ainz said, forcing some semblance of fighting spirit back into himself as he gave that order. Narberal had a look of absolute confidence in Ainz’s victory on her face as she bowed deeply and then retreated to a corner of the clearing.

“Oh — but know thou that being outnumbered is no handicap for this one?”

“…I can’t do something as embarrassing as fighting a hamster two-on-one.”

After hearing those words and seeing Ainz raise his weapons in a fighting stance, the Wise King of the Forest lowered its body and tensed its entire body.

“Regret not thy decision! Now bear the charge of this one!”

The massive body forcefully kicked off the earth with a mighty *bang*, and lunged at Ainz.

The flying tackle of the Wise King of the Forest’s massive body would have tossed any ordinary person away, had they been hit by it without using a martial art.

However, Ainz used the blades of his greatswords as a shield, and took the Wise King of the Forest's charge head on.

Despite its fearsome destructive power, Ainz still easily resisted it..

"Muuuuu!"

The Wise King of the Forest was surprised by the unmoving Ainz, and slashed with the surprisingly sharp claws on its forepaws. Ainz raised the greatsword in his left hand to block the strike, and swung with the greatsword in his right.

He did not put his full strength into it, but it was still quite a forceful blow.

There was a loud crash, and Ainz's strike was deflected away, his arm numbed from the impact. It would seem the Wise King of the Forest had blocked Ainz's strike with its claws, and the two attacks had bounced apart after an intense mid-air clash.

"Well done! But how about this? [Charm Species]."

Mind-affecting effects were useless against the undead. Ignoring his opponent's magical attack, Ainz swung both his greatswords.

There was a sound of clashing metal again, and Ainz's swords were deflected once more.

Ainz narrowed his eyes under his helmet.

While that had only been a probing attack, the Wise King of the Forest had deflected that strike with its skin. It would seem that its hide was harder than most metals.

Was it not soft and fluffy fur? It was quite surprising, but Ainz chased away these thoughts which had no place in a battle.

Ainz's physical attack power would be around that of a level 30 warrior, in YGGDRASIL terms. However, that was greatly affected by spells and equipment, so he could not be sure. Still, with that as a baseline, the Wise King of the Forest had the fighting power of a level 30 or so character.

A frown grew on the illusory face under Ainz's helmet.

"Not bad… very suitable for melee combat training."

Ainz was certain that as long as he went all-out, he could definitely defeat this opponent. Although he had to stay alert, it was still good practice for being a frontliner.

Ainz continued swinging his twin greatswords, and the Wise King of the Forest continued its adroit deflection of his blows. Then another glyph on its body lit up, and it cast a spell.

"[Blindness]."

Unlike the previous [Charm Species], this non-mind-affecting spell of blindness could potentially have affected Ainz. However, Ainz had a racial skill which rendered him immune to low-tier magic. Therefore, the spell vanished without ever taking effect.

A different symbol lit up when it used that spell… it seems the symbols on its body represent the spells it can use…

There were spellcasting monsters in YGGDRASIL. While the numbers of spells they could use varied greatly according to their level and species, as a rough guideline, they could use about eight kinds of magic. Similarly, the Wise King of the Forest had roughly eight kinds of tattoos on its body, so Ainz felt like he was fighting a monster from YGGDRASIL.

The Wise King of the Forest did not notice its spell had been resisted, and attacked with its forepaws. Ainz blocked with the greatsword in one hand and countered with the greatsword in his other.

He thought of past battles alongside his friends.

Touch Me, who wielded a sword and shield and was one of the greatest warriors in YGGDRASIL. Nishiki Enrai, who bore the twin kodachis named Amaterasu and Tsukiyomi, and boasted the highest attack power in the guild. The man also known as No Second Strike — although that was not actually the case — wielding the twin nodachis known as God-Slaying Slash Emperor and Takemikazuchi Mk 8, Warrior Takemikazuchi.

And then he recalled the brave man he had encountered recently — Gazef Stronoff, the Kingdom's Warrior Captain.

Perhaps Ainz had travelled to E-Rantel in the guise of a warrior because he had been moved by that man.

Ainz mocked himself for thinking of these things now.

I can't let my mind wander in combat. Although there's certainly enough leeway for it, I can't be careless… even if my opponent is *a hamster…*

He imagined the countless sword strokes his companions had made, and Ainz attacked continuously, trying his best to reproduce those moves. At the same time, he used the greatsword in his left hand to intercept the Wise King of the Forest's counterattacks.

Both sides went back and forth, neither side being able to strike a decisive blow, until Ainz's greatsword finally breached the Wise King of the Forest's defense.

“What!”

The scent of fresh blood followed the sensation of the greatsword piercing into flesh. The greatsword in his right hand grazed the hide of the Wise King of the Forest, sending hairs flying.

He planned to continue his assault with his left-hand greatsword, but the Wise King of the Forest sensed it was at a disadvantage and leapt away, landing about ten meters away from Ainz.

I’ve heard hamsters escape their nests by jumping, but I’ve never seen one retreat before.

Just as Ainz began losing himself in thought after battling the giant hamster, the Wise King of the Forest lowered its body.

Ainz watched his opponent’s movements in surprise.

What does it plan to do at that range? If it’s a charge like just now, then I’ll just hold my sword out to let it kill itself… but it’s most likely that it’s going to use another spell.

The Wise King of the Forest curled its tail up behind it, but judging by its length, it probably shouldn’t be able to reach —

“— No, that’s not it!”

Ainz realised that he had miscalculated.

The tail strike at the beginning had come from a long distance away. In other words, he was still in range of the tail attack.

As expected, the tail swung in a huge, sweeping arc, speeding at Ainz with its surprising length. Ainz blocked it with his right-hand greatsword… and his eyes went wide with surprise. This was because the tail had turned at a right angle, using the greatsword as a fulcrum of sorts.

“!”

He swung his greatsword to the side, aiming to cast away the tail which was on his sword. However, he was a moment too late, and the tail scraped the back plate of his armor, sending an impact through his body.

Due to a racial skill, an attack like this would not have hurt Ainz even if the tail had struck him dead on. However, if one thought of this as a first-person shooter game, then he had made a great mistake.

“Now, we are one for one.”

A mere hamster — anger rose inside him.

Then, let me try a ranged attack of my own.

Having decided this, Ainz firmly gripped his right-hand greatsword. As Ainz was preparing his attack, the Wise King of the Forest spoke, with heartfelt respect:

“That armor… ‘tis truly amazing. Nay, thy strength and swordplay are both breathtaking to behold. Thou art truly a superlative warrior. Art thou a man of fame in human society?”

The strength faded from his right hand.

In a somewhat disappointed tone, he asked: “Do I look like a warrior to you?”

“Why dost thou ask? What wouldst thou resemble, save a warrior? Mayhaps thou might be better addressed as a knight?”

“The Wise King of the Forest… well, you’ve been misnamed. Or rather, everything started going wrong once I discovered you were a giant hamster…”

Indeed, it was hard to think of Ainz as a magic caster in this suit of full plate armor. Still, he had hoped that something with the grand title of Wise King of the Forest would at least have noticed something amiss, or showed some sign that it could see through his disguise.

The Wise King of the Forest must have thought that Ainz’s magic immunity was simply resisting the spell through sheer force of will. Granted, special defenses like resistance and immunity were practically the same thing in YGGDRASIL, but at least it should have tried to act like a proper sage.

In the end, it was completely undeserving of the title of “Wise King”. Maybe if it had been called a Giant Djungarian Hamster, he would not have held such high hopes. Whoever called him a “Wise King” must have had something wrong with him. It was a mislabelling, false advertising.

Having lost the will to fight, Ainz powerlessly lowered the greatswords in his hands.

“What art thou doing!? Could it possibly be… dost thou intend to yield before the battle is decided? Come at this one with all thy strength! This is a duel to the death!”

The words from the angry Wise King of the Forest chipped away at Ainz’s heart. Fortunately, great emotional upheavals were suppressed immediately, so he still had some strength remaining.

“That’s… enough.”

Speaking with a cold, crystal clear voice, Ainz pointed his right-hand greatsword at the Wise King of the Forest and activated his skill.

Despair Aura V.

Since its instant death effect was too strong, he decided to reduce its potency and instead activated [Despair Aura I]'s fear effect.

A cold, soul-chilling vapor gusted out from Ainz

The moment that mass of cold air washed over the Wise King of the Forest, every single one of its hairs stood on end, and it rolled over with surprising speed. All he could see was its silvery fur, and its soft, defenseless belly.

“Craven! This one yields to thee!”

“…Ah… in the end it was just a beast…”

As he muttered tiredly in response, Ainz walked over to the Wise King of the Forest, observing its vulnerable belly, and then considered what he should do next.

It's a creature of this world, so chasing it away would be a shame. Sadly, it's just a hamster, so should I raise it as a pet… at the very least, I should make use of its corpse.

One of Ainz's job classes was called Necromancer. It was a class that allowed one to turn a corpse into an undead slave, though the quality of the undead produced depended on the species of the corpse.

The best corpses were those of powerful beings like dragons, while human corpses could become zombies and skeletons. Then, given that the Wise King of the Forest did not exist in YGGDRASIL, what sort of undead would its corpse make?

A Wise King of the Forest Zombie?

“Shall we kill it?” a cheery voice rang out.

Ainz turned, and found that Aura had mysteriously appeared beside Narberal.

“If you kill it, I’d like its hide. It looks like it would make a great pelt…”

Ainz lowered his head and looked straight at the Wise King of the Forest, who was looking at him with moist, tear-filled eyes. Its whiskers twitched as it waited fearfully for its future to be decided.

Just then, he suddenly recalled the words which he had exchanged with the Wise King of the Forest. Ainz recalled the part about friends.

Ainz found that he was hesitating. Then, with a sigh, he made his decision.

“My true name is Ainz Ooal Gown. If you are willing to serve me, I will spare your life.”

“Th-thank you very much! This one shall offer absolute fealty to thee for the gift of this one’s life! The life of the Wise King of the Forest shall be an offering to the great warrior, Ainz Ooal Gown-sama!”

Aura looked at the Wise King of the Forest, who had jumped up and was frantically pledging its loyalty. There seemed to be something like regret in Aura’s eyes.

♦♦♦

Once they left the forest, they encountered the others, who rejoiced that Ainz and Narberal were both unharmed. Only Lukrut seemed to have his doubts.

In a tone that combined surprise and praise, Nfirea asked Ainz:

“You’re unhurt… Did you avoid fighting?”

Just as Ainz was about to answer, Lukrut cut in:

“Momon-san, what did you bring back? Were you charmed by something?”

“I battled the Wise King of the Forest, and tamed it. Oi, come out.”

They could all see the pearly-white fur of the Wise King of the Forest as it emerged from the trees. The Swords of Darkness gathered around Nfirea, shocked expressions on their faces as they all took a step back with weapons raised.

Well, it’s huge, even if it’s a Djungarian Hamster…

Though it had cute round eyes, its massive body was still a fearsome sight, and it was only natural that these adventurers should be wary on behalf of the client they were escorting. With that in mind, Ainz decided to calmly say:

“Be at ease, everyone. I have subdued it, so it will not lash out wildly and hurt people.”

Then, he approached the Wise King of the Forest, and made a show of patting its furry body.

“It is as milord says; this Wise King of the Forest is loyal to milord, and is milord’s faithful servant. This one swears to milord that this one will not inconvenience thee, fine gentlemen!”

In this way, the Wise King of the Forest displayed its loyalty to Ainz.

Perhaps they were on guard because of its vast size, but since it was a cute Djungarian Hamster to begin with, they would probably stop being on edge once they got used to it. The problem was how to make everyone think it was the true Wise King of the Forest. That was the only thing Ainz had no idea how to accomplish.

And then, things developed in a completely unexpected direction.

“…So this is the Wise King of the Forest! Unbelievable! What a majestic beast!”

—*What?*

Ainz looked back and forth between Ninya and the Wise King of the Forest, checking to see if Ninya was making fun of him, but Ninya seemed to be entirely serious.

“…Wow, the Wise King of the Forest… so the legends really were true! I can feel its mighty presence just standing before it!” Dyne gasped.

Eh? Mighty presence?

“Uwah, that’s pretty awesome. You actually pulled it off. Someone as strong as you is certainly qualified to have Nabe-chan at his side.”

“If we had encountered him, we would have been killed for sure. I expected nothing less of you, Momon-san. Amazing work.”

As Lukrut, Peter and the others showered him in praise, Ainz looked to the Wise King of the Forest again.

A giant Djungarian Hamster.

It did not remind him of anything else. Why were they so intimidated by a beast like this?

“…Everyone, do you not think this creature’s eyes are very cute?”

Their eyes went wide as they heard those words, as though their eyeballs were about to fall out. It would seem that statement was quite absurd.

“Mo-Momon-san, Do you think this beast’s eyes are cute?”

Of course. After mocking the reply in his heart, Ainz magnanimously nodded, and then he began to wonder if the Wise King of the Forest had used a passive charm skill.

“Unbelievable, that’s Momon-san for you. Ninya, you looked into its eyes, what do you think ?”

“…They are eyes filled with wisdom, and I could feel the power of this beast. There’s no way it could be cute by any stretch of the word.”

“…!?”

Ainz looked dumbfoundedly at the others. After realizing that they shared Ninya’s opinion, Ainz felt his head spin for a moment.

“How about you, Nabe?”

“Actual strength aside, those are powerful-looking eyes.”

“…no…way…seriously…?”

They were all gushing praise with sparkly eyes. In other words, they were in awe of Ainz for being able to nonchalantly call the eyes of such a beast “cute”.
Ainz kept glancing back at the Wise King of the Forest, but there

was no way he could see anything approaching “wisdom” in them.

Could it be that my aesthetic sense changed as well after becoming undead?

Since nobody apart from himself felt that way, it was quite likely that such a change had taken place. However, it was probably best to make absolutely sure.

“By the way, does everyone think rats are strong?”

“Rats… giant rats? Monsters like that aren’t anything special.”

“You can find them in the sewers of E-Rantel.”

“Giant rats carry nasty diseases. Wererats too… hmm, since wererats can resist damage made from everything except silver weapons, would they qualify as strong?”

Don’t hamsters look like rats? And the Wise King of the Forest has a very long tail… it’s more like a rat than a hamster…

A puzzled Ainz came to a conclusion. In other words: “This world is weird.”

Just as Ainz was agonizing over trivial matters like the differences between this world and the previous one, Nfirea asked in a worried tone of voice:

“But if you take this monster away, and thus its sphere of influence, won’t the other monsters attack En… Carne Village because it’s not there to scare it off any more?”

Ainz raised his chin to indicate the Wise King of the Forest. It got the message, and said:

"By village you mean… ah, well, the balance of power in the forest is now in chaos. Even if this one was there, this one would not be able to guarantee their safety by any means."

"No way…"

Ainz did not comfort the shocked Nfirea. He merely smiled inside.

The Wise King of the Forest is hardly a fitting name, let's see what I can get out of this.

Just as Ainz was thinking about how to guide the conversation, he could feel Nfirea looking at him. He seemed to be wavering between speaking and keeping quiet, and his mouth opened and closed like a goldfish.

Ainz understood the turmoil in Nfirea's heart. On one hand, he must have wanted Ainz to save the village once more. On the other, Nfirea probably felt that it was too troublesome, and did not want to leave everything to him.

As the Swords of Darkness discussed how to save the village, Nfirea made up his mind and addressed Ainz with a serious look on his face.

"—Momon-san."

"Yes?"

A secretly delighted Ainz waited for what Nfirea would say next.

The truth was that Ainz had always intended to protect Carne Village, which was highly valuable as a source of information. However, the important thing was whether he could profit from it. Since he could frame the thing as doing a favor for Nfirea and thus make Nfirea indebted to him, it was like killing two birds with one stone. This was Ainz's plan in order to make up for the miscalculation with the Wise King of the Forest.

However, Nfirea's words vastly exceeded Ainz's expectations.

"Momon-san! Please let me join your team!"

"Hah?!"

"I want to protect Enri… Carne Village, but I don't have the strength to do it now. So I want to become stronger! I want to learn the secret to your strength, Momon-san! I don't mind if it's just a little bit! However, I can't hire an excellent adventurer like you on a long-term basis with the amount of money I have! So please, let me join your party! I have some confidence in my ability as a herbalist, but I'm willing to carry luggage and do other menial labor! Please allow me to do this, I beg you!"

Just as Ainz was blinking his non-existent eyelids, Nfirea continued:

"I've always been researching herbological knowledge. I didn't give that decision much thought because my grandmother and father were both herbalists… but now I've found the path I want to walk, and it's not as a herbalist."

"So, you want to become a great magic caster and protect Carne Village, then?"

"Yes!"

Nfirea seemed to have shed his youthful attitude, and looked straight at Ainz, his eyes filled with a manly resolve.

♦♦♦

In YGGDRASIL, there had been an endless stream of applicants seeking to join the guild Ainz Ooal Gown. Most of them wanted to do so for personal gain, thinking that they would profit from joining one of the highest-ranked guilds in the game. They did not think of what they could do for the guild, but what the guild could do for them.

In addition, there were those who wanted to infiltrate the guild to steal its information and rare items.

Because of this, Ainz Ooal Gown did not increase its numbers much beyond its founding members. They were careful not to let their hard work and effort be trampled by others.

Still, this was the simple, pure desire of a man who knew nothing of the guild called Ainz Ooal Gown. His misguided way of thinking was quite refreshing.

♦♦♦

"…Ha, hahaha!"

Ainz laughed, long and loud. His laughter was light and buoyant. Then, when he was done, he removed his helmet and bowed deeply.

He could hear Narberal taking a deep breath in the background.

Actions like this did not fit Narberal's master, the supreme ruler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick. Still, Ainz felt that he had to do this, without any hesitation about whether it was right or proper. He did not feel that bowing to a young man who was only half his age was shameful.

There was no malice in Ainz's laughter, but Ainz now knew he should not have done so. He raised his head to face the surprised Nfirea:

"…Forgive me for my laughter. That was a mistake on my part. But I would like you to understand that I was not laughing at your determination. In order to join my team, you must meet two criteria. At the moment, you have only met one of them. Therefore, I am sorry, but I cannot let you join."

The hidden condition was that more than half of the present guild members had to approve of the prospective member. Therefore, even if Ainz agreed, he could not add members to the guild on his own. However, Ainz was pleased by the loyalty which the Guardians of Nazarick had shown him after coming to this world, and in that good mood, he continued:

"I understand how you feel, and I will remember that you wished to join my team. As for protecting this village, I will exert all my power to aid you. However, I might need your help—"

"Yes! Please, I'm eager to help!"

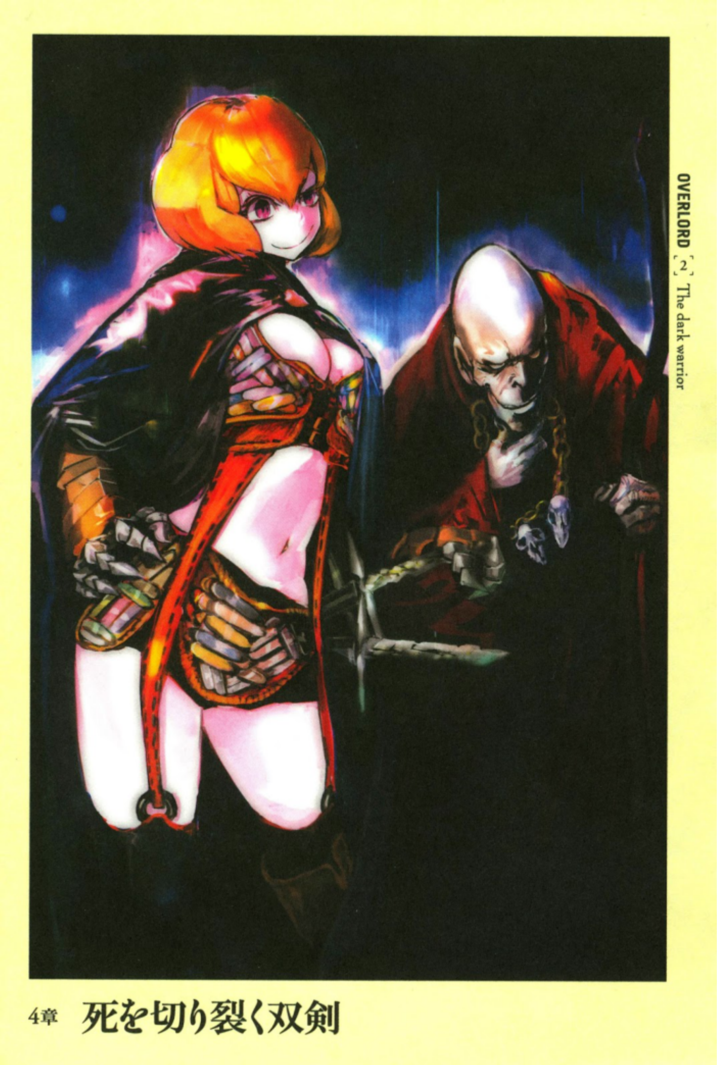
"Is that so, is that so…"

As Ainz was nodding, he met Ninya's gaze. He seemed to be enjoying the show, which made Ainz feel a little embarrassed.

"Then, we'll discuss that matter later. Before that, I have an interesting story to tell everyone, about the taming of the Wise King of the Forest."

Overlord Volume 2 Chapter 4

Twin Swords of Death


OVERLORD 「2」 The dark warrior
4章 死を切り裂く双剣

Translator: Nigel
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Part 1

They had spent a night outside on the way to Carne Village, and another night within the village itself. After that, they left Carne Village for the city of E-Rantel in the morning, and thus their journey of three days and two nights came to an end. It was almost nightfall by the time they returned to the Fortress City.

The main roads were lit by streetlamps made from [Continual Light] spells, which cast white-colored illumination, while the nature of the pedestrians had changed as well. There were no young women and children to be seen, but instead working men returning home after they were done for the day. The two rows of shops on either side emitted cheerful and pleasant sounds.

Ainz looked around him.

The city had not changed much in three days. Or rather, he had gone to Carne Village right after arriving in E-Rantel, so he did not have much basis for comparison. Still, he felt that the peaceful streets remained the same.

They turned off the main road, and then Ainz and company came to a halt.

Obviously stopping in the middle of a busy thoroughfare would be a big hindrance, but nobody dared complain. This was because nobody dared go near Ainz.

Ainz tiredly rounded his back, and then peeked at the people around him.

Just about everyone walking past on the street seemed to be looking in Ainz's direction — no, they were staring at him — and whispering to each other.

The sounds of their chatter filtered into Ainz's ears, and he felt like they were mocking him. However, that was just a mistake on his part. If he strained to listen, he would realise that everyone was discussing matters in tones of praise, surprise or outright fear.

Even so, he could not find it in himself to be relieved.

Ainz silently lowered his head and looked at the pearly-white fur beneath him. It was there because he was riding the Wise King of the Forest.

The people around him were surprised by the Wise King of the Forest's majestic — Ainz wanted to dispute this choice of words — form, and they were discussing how that warrior could ride such a fearsome yet dignified beast, and so on.

I should be able to take pride in that… right…?

This reaction was entirely understandable. The people were praising the Wise King of the Forest as a mighty creature, but to Ainz, it was more like a form of public humiliation. For comparison, it was like a middle-aged bachelor with no family or girlfriend proudly riding a merry-go-round by himself.

In addition, he was riding in an unsightly manner. Because the Wise King of the Forest had a completely different body structure from a regular horse, Ainz was forced to stick his butt out and back while spreading his legs wide. If he did not adopt this stance —which resembled someone jumping over a box — while riding, it would be difficult to keep his balance.

Naturally, riding the Wise King of the Forest was not Ainz's idea. It had taken not only the Swords of Darkness and the Wise King of the Forest itself to persuade him, but also Narberal's humble submission that "a ruler should not be walking". That made him think that perhaps riding it back would be a good idea, but it had ended up like this.

If I'd known this would happen I would have refused. Could it be someone was trying to set me up and arranged for this?

Riding a hamster was something one would hear about in children's fairytales. However, those creatures were best suited for boys and girls. At a stretch, it might be all right for a woman to ride one. A rugged warrior in full plate armor was right out.

However, the surrounding folk all seemed to think that Ainz was the one with the strange reaction.

Could it be that my aesthetic sense is at fault, or that they have weird taste, or is it that this world's sense of aesthetics is completely messed up?

Of course, the answer went without saying. As long as the majority of people felt that it looked good, then it was Ainz's aesthetic sense which was at fault. This was why he could not protest riding the Wise King of the Forest too vigorously. In addition, if riding it made Momon the adventurer that much more memorable — which would help in finding his feet here — all the more reason to do so. All the same—

Isn't this basically a form of shame play?

Ainz's psyche automatically suppressed any emotions he experienced which exceeded a certain magnitude, but this was not happening now. In other words, this was not really affecting him. All this told Ainz one thing.

Does this mean I'm immune to shame play… don't tell me I'm a masochist?… But I've always felt I was more on the sadist side…

"Since we're back in town, it seems the assignment is over."

As Ainz compared the images and videos he had collected in the past to his current mental state and agonized over his sexual fetishes, Peter and Nfirea struck up a conversation.

"Indeed, you're right, the request is at an end. Then… while I've already prepared the arranged remuneration, I still have to pay the bonus we negotiated in the forest. Could you come to my family's store with me?"

The wagon behind Nfirea was piled high with herbs. In addition, there was tree bark, strange fruits which looked like branches, a gigantic mushroom that was large enough for a man to put his arms around, extremely tall grasses, and other such harvests. To an amateur, they seemed like nothing more than plants, but to a trained eye, they were a heaping pile of glittering treasure.

After Ainz subdued the Wise King of the Forest, they were free to fully explore the region in its former sphere of influence. They discovered many rare and valuable herbs, as well as other efficacious ingredients which could be used to make other potions. Nfirea picked and picked nonstop, promising the others that he would pay them a generous bonus on top of the prearranged amount.

“Momon-shi, you should go to the Adventurer’s Guild first!”

“Mm, indeed. Since I brought a monster into a city, I need to register the Wise King of the Forest with the Guild.”

“It’s troublesome, but it can’t be helped.”

“Well, we wiped out those Ogres and other monsters too, so how about it? Want to all go to the Guild together?”

“Hmm — no, I think not. Momon-san basically did all the heavy lifting for this job, so we should go to Nfirea-san’s house first to help with the chores and unload the herbs. Otherwise I wouldn’t be able to accept getting the same fees as Momon-san.”

The Swords of Darkness nodded as Peter spoke, and Nfirea politely added:

“There’s no need to trouble everyone…”

“Well, you did agree to pay us a bonus, so consider this a free service on our part.”

After hearing Peter’s light-hearted statement, Nfirea politely replied:

“Then, when you come to our store for potions, we’ll give you a discount.”

“Nothing would please us more. Then, Momon-san, please head to the Guild first, and meet us at Nfirea-san’s home afterwards. We’ll proceed directly to Nfirea-san’s home, take care of the chores, and then go to the Guild to take care of paperwork. Unfortunately, we’ll have to trouble you to come again tomorrow because we can only claim the bounty on the Ogres then… we’ll meet at the same time as the last time we met you.”

“Understood.”

Ainz nodded in response to this suggestion. Since he could simply register by nonchalantly asking the Guild receptionists, he did not want to go to the Guild with them. He would have to pretend that he knew how to read this and write that, and it might well cause all his hard work over the past few days to go up in smoke.

“Then, we’ll let you take care of business.”

Ainz nodded slightly, and then he and Narberal parted ways with Nfirea and the Swords of Darkness. At this point, Narberal leaned in and asked:

“Can we trust them?”

“…It’s fine. Even if they betray us, the most we’ll lose is the bounty for the Ogres. If we fixate on that measly amount of money and end up with a reputation as penny-pinchers, it’ll do more harm than good to our cause.”

Ainz had come to this city to make a name for himself. Gaining a reputation for pettiness would impede his future plans.

He would simply have to pretend that he really was that big-hearted.

As he thought of that, Ainz idly reached for his laced-up money pouch. His fingertips pressed it flat almost immediately — a sign that there was not much money inside — but he could easily tell that there were still a few coins left. However, he had the night’s lodgings to worry about.

It might not be enough if he included the costs for food and drink, but Ainz was undead, while the ring on Narberal’s finger was imbued with magic that removed the need for her to eat or drink, which helped a lot in cutting costs. Narberal could wear and use two rings, and one of her ring slots was allocated to this one. Initially, it had been chosen to protect against consuming something poisonous, but it had proved unexpectedly useful in this situation.

However, as he glanced at the Wise King of the Forest beneath him, he mused, “This guy has got to eat at some point.”

Then Narberal cut in:

“Indeed… it would be strange for the almighty Ainz-sama to be concerned about such a small sum. My apologies for my rudeness.”

“Umu.”

Ainz patted his money pouch again, and he felt what seemed like a stream of sweat on his back, which should not have been to produce sweat. He silently cursed himself for handicapping himself for no reason. And also—

Ainz-sama… don’t call me that any more, Narberal. At least nobody *was around to hear you…*

As Ainz sighed internally, Narberal happily continued:

“Those inferior lifeforms (crane flies) should prostrate themselves before your awesome power, Ainz-sama.”

“Well, maybe not to that extent…”

“Ainz-sama, you are being too modest. Although Ogres must be less than insects in your eyes, your sword skills are still first-rate. I am truly amazed, Ainz-sama.”

Ainz felt a strange trembling through his waist from the Wise King of the Forest, but he paid it no heed, and instead told Narberal:

“…I was merely swinging my swords using sheer brute force.”

Though killing Ogres in one stroke sounded quite impressive, this was not actually the case. When he watched Gazef fight earlier, Ainz had seen the man’s fluid movements and technique, but when he reflected on his own moves, he was reminded of a child flailing around with a stick. It shamed him to realize it.

What the Swords of Darkness admired was only the destructive power born of his superhuman strength. It was completely different from their praise of a real warrior like Gazef.

“It would seem it’s very difficult to move and fight like a real warrior.”

“…Then what about using magic to transform into one?”

There were five spells Ainz could use while wearing armor, and one of them allowed him to convert his magic caster levels into an equivalent number of warrior levels. In other words, by using that spell, he could temporarily become a level 100 warrior.

Although it also carried the benefit of being able to use certain pieces of arms and armor that would normally require specific job classes to access, there were many drawbacks to that spell. The first weakness was that he could not cast other spells while the magic was in effect. In addition, he would not gain any special warrior skills from the spell, and his recalculated ability scores would be lower than an actual warrior. In other words, it was a spell that turned him into a half-baked level 100 warrior. Of course, it was enough when matching blades with second-rate combatants like priests and the like, but he would have no chance of winning against an opponent who was a dedicated warrior.

Even so, Ainz would be much stronger in that state than he was now.

The problem was —

“There’s too many drawbacks to that spell. If I’m ambushed by an opponent of my level, I won’t be able to use magic for a while, and defeat is certain. I could use scrolls to cast spells, but it would take too much preparation time. It’s still a major flaw in the spell.”

Since he did not know if there were any enemy players around, he could not allow himself to lower his guard. There was no need to use that spell and make himself weaker on purpose.

“I’m pretending to be a warrior to hide my true identity, so there’s no need to be so shocked.”

“!”

A tremor ran through the Wise King of the Forest as it raised its head to look at Ainz, a surprised look on its face.

“Your humble servant was listening to your words; could it be that you are not a warrior, milord?”

The Wise King of the Forest looked up to Ainz with its round, black eyes. Ainz looked back and nodded sagely. With a hint of pride in her voice, Narberal explained:

“Ainz-sama is merely pretending to be a warrior. It is like a game to him. If he were to use the spells which are his true power, he could easily sunder the heavens and shatter the earth.”

Ainz could not bring himself to deny Narberal with words like, “No way”, not when he was confronted with her absolute faith in him, or the fact that she felt it was perfectly logical.

“…Mm, yes, something like that. Wise King of the Forest, aren’t you glad you didn’t fight the real me? If I had used my true power, you would have been destroyed in an instant.”

“I, I see… Milord, your servant Hamsuke shall be doubly faithful to you!”

When the Wise King of the Forest asked for a name, the first thing that came to Ainz’s mind was Hamsuke. Once he named it Hamsuke, the Wise King of the Forest seemed quite pleased with it. However, when he thought about it, the name Hamsuke was actually quite lame.

…Maybe I was too hasty in naming it Hamsuke… Perhaps Daifuku… that name might have been wittier… the people in the guild always said I had poor naming sense…

With a faint sense of regret, Ainz — mounted atop Hamsuke, the Wise King of the Forest — wobbled toward the Adventurer's Guild.

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They drove the wagon into the house's backyard, stopping in front of the back door. Nfirea unlocked the door, a magical lantern in hand. He hung it on a wall inside, illuminating the darkened interior.

Because of the lantern's light, they could see several barrels within the house. The smell of dried herbs hung in the air, suggesting that this room was a place for herb storage.

"Then, could I trouble you to help me with the herbs?"

The Swords of Darkness cheerfully replied in the affirmative as they carefully unloaded the bundles of herbs from the wagon, moving them into the room.

As he showed the adventurers where to put the bundles, a question popped up in his mind:

"Isn't Granny home?"

Nfirea’s grandmother was quite old, but she still had keen eyes and ears. She should have come the moment she heard them moving things. However, if she was focused on making potions, then she would not pay attention to lesser noises. Since this seemed like par for the course, Nfirea did not make a big deal out of it.

After all the herbs were in their place, Nfirea called out to the slightly-panting Swords of Darkness.

“Thank you for your hard work! There should be some cool fruit juice in the house, so please come in for some.”

“That sounds great.”

Lukrut, his forehead shiny with sweat, exclaimed in delight. The others nodded happily as well.

“Then, please come this way…”

Just as Nfirea was about to lead the others into the house, someone opened the door on the other side of the room.

“Hiiii~ Welcome home~”

Before him stood a pretty, yet vaguely unsettling young woman. Her blonde hair swayed in the wind.

“Ah~ I’ve been worried, you know? I thought you went missing.

What poor timing — I didn’t know when you’d be coming back, so I had to wait here all this while, you know?”

“…May, may I ask who you are?”

“Eh! You don’t know each other?”

Peter exclaimed in surprise. He thought they knew each other, from her familiar tone of voice.

“Hm? Ehehehe~ I came to kidnap you~ I need someone to use the spell which summons a biiiiiig horde of undead, [Undeath Army], so could you be my magic item? Onee-chan’s begging you~”

The Swords of Darkness sensed the air of malice radiating from the girl, and they immediately drew their weapons. Although everyone else was in a combat stance, the girl airily said:

“That’s a 7th-tier spell which hardly anyone can use, but it can be cast with the Crown of Wisdom. You can’t control all the undead it makes, but you can guide them! What a perfect plan~!”

“Nfirea-san, fall back! Get out of here!”

Peter eyed the woman warily, his sword in hand, and spoke in a steely tone:

“She’s going on and on because she’s certain she can kill us all. Since you’re her target, the only way to turn things around is for you to escape.”

As Nfirea withdrew in a panic, the Swords of Darkness closed ranks in front of him, turning themselves into his meatshields.

“Ninya, you go too!”

After Dyne spoke, Lukrut shouted:

“Take the kid and run! Weren’t you going to save your kidnapped sister?”

“That’s right. You’ve got something you have to do. Though we might not be able to help you until the very end… at least we can buy you some time.”

“Guys…”

“Mmm~ how touching~ I’m about to shed a tear myself, mm. But if he escapes, it’d be troublesome for me. So let’s leave one to play with~”

The girl smiled happily and withdrew a pair of stilettos from under her robe as she saw the doubtful gaze on Ninya’s face as he bit his lip. Just then, the rear door swung open, revealing a sickly-pale, stick-thin man, who looked like one of the undead.

They were caught in a pincer attack. The Swords of Darkness’ faces turned grim.

"…You're getting carried away."

"Ah~ What're you saying, Khazi-chan? Weren't you the one making preparations so their screams wouldn't spill out? It's just one person, so let me enjoy myself~"

The way the girl smiled with her teeth bared sent a chill down Nfirea's spine.

"Then, since there's nowhere for you to run, let's have some fun~"

Part 2

Registering Hamsuke itself was simple enough, but it took about one and a half hours. The most time-consuming part of the process was sketching an identification picture of Hamsuke by hand. While magic could have sped up the process, Ainz did not want to go to the extra expense of paying for a spell, which had led to this situation.

Ainz had to make up an excuse in order to avoid being labelled as petty.

"Although it's a little late to mention this, the whole 'I'm interested in drawing' excuse is getting old… Ah, forget it. Let's go over now," Ainz said to Narberal as he finished the registration, before he headed toward Hamsuke.

He had become used to it.

Since the merry-go-round was not the exclusive domain of the rich — or people with lovers or family — then it made no difference if a lonely older man rode it.

Having given up on himself, there was no hesitation in Ainz's movements.

Using his superior athletic ability, he mounted the Wise King of the Forest with a masterful vault. If he were an athlete, his name would have gone down in the history books. He did not have a saddle or reins, but several hours of experience was enough for Ainz to learn how to skilfully mount up.

The pedestrians were gasping in awe as far as his eyes could see. He could even hear the sounds of women screaming in excitement. In particular, he felt the piercing gazes of his fellow adventurers burning into him. After seeing the copper plate around Ainz's neck, their eyes went wide with disbelief.

I'm the one who should have a hard time believing this. What's wrong with your sense of aesthetics?

Just then, a voice called out to Ainz, interrupting the foolish questions in his heart and the process of ordering Hamsuke to move out.

"Say, would you be the people who went herb-picking with my grandson?"

The voice was an aged one. When he turned to look, he found an old granny.

“…And who might you be?”

He said that, but Ainz could guess at the answer. If this granny’s words were genuine, then there could be only one answer to that question.

“My name is Lizzie Bareare. I’m Nfirea’s grandmother.”

“Ah! So it really was you? That’s right, I’m one of the adventurers who escorted your grandson to Carne Village. My name is Momon, and this is Nabe.”

Lizzie smiled to the bowing Narberal:

“She’s an unbelievably beautiful girl. And what is the name of the creature you’re riding?”

“It is the Wise King of Forest, Hamsuke.”

“This one is Hamsuke! This one is very pleased to meet you!”

“What! This mighty beast is the legendary Wise King of the Forest?!”

The adventurers around them who heard Lizzie’s cry were even more surprised. With shocked looks on their faces, they whispered "Is that really the monster of legends?" and so on.

"Indeed. After receiving your grandson's request, we encountered it at our destination and I managed to tame it."

"You actually… tamed the Wise King of the Forest…"

Lizzie was dumbstruck and could do nothing but stare.

"Then… where is my grandson now?"

"Ah, he went home first with the herbs. We're heading over there now to collect our payment."

The old lady breathed a sigh of relief, and then looked at Ainz with a strange look in her eyes:

"Oh, I see… then, shall we go together? I'm quite interested in you adventurer types."

To Ainz, Lizzie's suggestion was like a life preserver to a drowning man.

"Ah, the pleasure's all mine."

The group proceeded through the streets of E-Rantel, led by Lizzie.

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“Then, please come in.”

Once they reached the storefront, Lizzie came to the front door and took out her keys. Then, she looked down, and pushed. The door swung open, without any resistance.

“What’s this? This is too careless of him.”

Lizzie muttered to herself as she entered the shop. Ainz and Narberal followed her.

“Nfirea, Momon-san’s here—”
Lizzie’s voice echoed through the shop, but it was silent. It felt as though there was nobody there.

“What happened?”

Lizzie was filled with confusion. Ainz, on the other hand, replied curtly:

“Trouble.”

Lizzie heard, but did not understand. Ainz paid her no heed, but instead placed his hands on the hilts of his greatswords. Narberal figured out what he was up to from that action and she drew her sword as well.

“What, what are you doing?!”

“Don’t ask, just follow.”

With that clipped answer, Ainz drew his weapons and entered the store. He kicked the door open and kept to the right as he went in. Though this was a stranger’s house, completely unfamiliar to him, there was no trace of hesitation in Ainz’s footsteps.

Ainz came to a door which led down, and then turned to Lizzie, who had just caught up with him:

“What is this place for?”

“This, this is the herb storage room, it leads to the back door.”

Although she was not sure what was going on, Lizzie sensed that something was wrong and began to worry. However, Ainz ignored her and pushed the door open.

What he smelled was not the scent of herbs, but a more acrid odour — the stench of blood.

The first people he saw were Peter and Lukrut. Dyne was a bit further beyond. Ninya was all the way inside the room. All of them were slumped against the walls. Their legs stuck forward and their arms drooped down lifelessly. They seemed to have lost all the blood in their bodies, which was now clotted on the ground so thickly that it looked black.

“This, what is this…”

A shocked Lizzie made to enter with shaky footsteps. Ainz put a hand on her shoulder to keep her from moving forward, and quickened his pace to get ahead of her.

Just then, the fallen Peter suddenly jerked like a puppet. However, before he could get up, the greatsword flashed across him.

Peter’s head rolled to the ground. With the blade in his other hand, he decapitated Lukrut, who was halfway through standing up.

Just as Lizzie managed to process the shock of the tragedy before her, Dyne, who was somewhat further inside, had already risen to his feet.

The face which raised itself was not a living one. There was no color in it and its eyes were clouded. There was a hole in its forehead, instantly recognizable as a fatal injury.

There was only one reason why a dead man would move again — because he was undead.

“Zombie!”

Just as Lizzie cried out, Dyne groaned menacingly and lurched at them. Ainz immediately thrust his greatsword at Dyne. His throat pierced, Dyne’s head shuddered and then he collapsed.

Nobody else moved.

Amidst the silence, Ainz stared at the unmoving Ninya.

“Nfirea!”

Lizzie finally realized what was going on, and began looking for her grandson. Ainz narrowed his eyes at her receding back, and gave Narberal an order.

“Protect her. My passive skill [Undead Blessing] isn’t giving me any reactions, so there shouldn’t be any more undead in the house. But there might be living people inside.”

“Understood.”

After a quick nod of her head, Narberal broke into a sprint to catch up with Lizzie.

Once he made sure that the two of them were gone, Ainz looked toward Ninya again. He kneeled slowly before him, and then gently touched the body. Once he was sure that there were none of the usual corpse boobytraps found in YGGDRASIL, he raised Ninya’s face. Of course, he was not unconscious, but dead.

He must have been beaten by some sort of blunt object, given how his cheeks were bloated up like pomegranates. If Ainz did not know it was Ninya, he might not have recognized the corpse at all.

His left eye was crushed, and the vitreous humor had flowed out. It looked like he was crying.

The bones of his fingers were completely pulverized. The skin was split open, revealing the red muscle underneath. In some places, there was no muscle at all. Ainz pulled open Ninya’s clothes, and his eyes went wide in surprise.

He closed up the garment, and muttered:

“…So even the body was…”

Much like the face, the body bore signs of a brutal beating. It was covered in the bruises of internal bleeding, and it would be harder to find a patch of uninjured flesh than the other way around.

Ainz gently closed Ninya’s eyes.

“…This is a little… upsetting.”

The sound of his murmurs faded into the air.

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“My grandson! Nfirea’s gone!”

Lizzie returned, shouting at the top of her voice Ainz had gathered all the corpses into a corner of the room, and calmly replied:

“I checked their gear. None of them were searched. That being the case, the opposition must have intended to kidnap Nfirea.”

“Oh!”

“Come see this.”

Ainz pointed to the letters written in blood under Ninya’s corpse. They would not be visible unless someone moved them.

“This is… the sewers? Does it mean he was taken to the sewers?”

“…It might be a trap set by the person who did this, and I have no idea how big the sewers are… searching them might take a long time. What do you think?”

“There’s numbers there, 2-8, what could that mean?”

“Those are even more suspicious. Although I don’t know what those numbers mean… but I can guess that you can divide the city into eight sections, or it might just be a simple 2-8… although, did Ninya really have the time to think of all that? Even if Ninya did write it, how much could he have learned from the enemy? This is far too much of a coincidence.”

Lizzie frowned her already wrinkled face, directing something that approached anger at Ainz, who was analyzing the entire situation with unexpected calmness. Then she looked at the four corpses on the ground.

“Who *are* these people?”

“…They were the adventurers your son hired, who went with us. After we parted ways, they should have come to help him unload the herbs.”

“What! Then they’re your comrades, aren’t they?”

Ainz shook his head:

“No, they were not. We just happened to be adventuring together.”

His cold words chilled Lizzie to the bone, and she had no desire to pursue the matter further.

“Come to think of it, I’ve been thinking about their corpses, but I’d like your opinion. What do you think about them being turned into Zombies?”

“…[Create Undead]. That means the enemy has someone who can use at least 3rd-tier magic. I don’t know anything else apart from that.”

“I think we need to think of something quickly.”

“Isn’t that obvious… what do you mean by that?”

“…The enemy could have used mind control or hidden the corpses, but they did not do that at all. They seemed to have done it for fun. Otherwise, they did it because they were absolutely sure they would not be exposed, or that they were completely confident in their ability to escape. Hm… I don’t know which of them it was. Since they could make Zombies, they could have brought the corpses back with them, right?”

If they wanted to kidnap Nfirea, all they would have to do was hide the bodies, which would have bought them enough time to escape. However, the enemy did not do that, which meant that they had other things to do, or because they wanted Lizzie to do something.

The latter was easier to deal with. It was the former which was tricky. Nfirea’s life and talent were valuable, but they might not be able to use them for long. Would these cruel people who could kill without blinking an eye let him live after using him up?

After Lizzie realised the meaning hidden in Ainz’s words, her gray face turned white. With no idea where he had been taken in this gigantic city, they would need to search the whole of E-Rantel, which would take far too long.

Their only clue was the sewers, but Ainz had his doubts about it.

The flame of Nfirea’s life was ebbing away with each passing moment.

Ainz calmly turned to the panicked Lizzie and asked:

“How about hiring us?”

The cold voice continued:

“Isn’t this something you should hire an adventurer for?”

A light came on in Lizzie’s eyes as she understood what Ainz was getting at.

“You are a very lucky woman, Lizzie Bareare. At the moment, I am the strongest adventurer in this city, and the only one who can save your grandson’s life. If you hire me, I will accept your request. However… the price will be very high, because I am fully aware of how troublesome this task might be.”

“That, that’s right… if it was you… the one who possessed that potion… and with the Wise King of the Forest… then there’s no doubt about your strength… I’ll hire, I’ll hire you!”

“Is that so… are you prepared to pay a high price for this?”

“How much will it take to satisfy you?”

“—Everything.”

“What?”

“Give me everything you have.”

Lizzie’s eyes widened in shock, and her body trembled violently.

“Everything you have. When I safely return Nfirea to you, give me everything you have.”

“You…”

Backing away in fear, Lizzie muttered:

“When you say everything… you don’t mean money or rare potions… I’ve heard that demons will grant any wish in return for men’s souls. Are you a demon?”

“…And what if I was? Do you want to save your grandson?”

Lizzie did not respond, silently biting her lip.

“Then there’s only one answer, right?”

“Umu… I’ll hire you. I’ll give you everything I have, so please save my grandson!”

“Very well, the pact is sealed. Then, let’s not waste time. Do you have a map of this city? If you do, lend it to me.”

Lizzie had her doubts, but she still handed the map to Ainz immediately.

“Then, we shall find Nfirea’s location next.”

“Can you do such a thing?!”

“Only this time. Just this one time, I can. I don’t know if the enemy was stupid or…”

As Ainz’s voice trailed off halfway, he turned to look at the four corpses resting within the room.

“Then, I shall begin the search. Go look in the other rooms and see if the people who kidnapped Nfirea left any clues behind. If kidnapping Nfirea was itself a distraction, that would make things troublesome. You’re familiar with this home, so you’re better suited to this.”

After thinking up a reason to get Lizzie out of the room, Ainz turned to Narberal.

“May I ask what you intend?”

“Simple. Look, their adventurers’ plates are all missing, probably taken by the person who attacked this place.The question now is why they didn’t take anything more valuable, but these plates…

what do you think?”

“My apologies, but I have no idea.”

“That’s because—”

Halfway through, a voice spoke in Ainz’s mind. It was the [Message] spell.

『Ainz-sama.』

The voice was somewhat high-pitched, and there was something like rustling in the background.

“Is that you, Entoma?”

『Yes, it is me.』

It was Entoma Vasilisa Zeta. She was a member of the Pleiades, like Narberal.

『I have a report to deliver.』

“—I’m busy now. I’ll contact you again when I’m free.”

『Understood. Please contact Albedo-sama as soon as possible.』

The spell ended, and Ainz continued replying to Narberal, who was looking at him:

“They were trophies, loot from hunting. Probably a memento for the killer to remember them by. However, that was a fatal mistake. Narberal, use these scrolls.”

Ainz pulled a scroll from his Infinite Backpack and handed it to Narberal.

“This is a scroll of [Locate Object]. I trust I don’t have to tell you what to look for?”

“Understood.”

With that acknowledgement, Narberal opened the scroll. Just as she was about to activate it, Ainz grabbed her hand and coldly rebuked Narberal:

“…Idiot.”

Narberal’s shoulder shuddered as Ainz scolded her.

“My, my apologies!”

“When using divination-type magic, you need to prepare yourself thoroughly against the enemy’s counter-detection spells before casting it. This is an ironclad rule. When considering that the opposition might use [Detect Locate], it’s a basic precaution to use

[False Cover], [Counter Detect], and the like to protect yourself. Also —”

Ainz prepared about ten more scrolls, and explained the function of each one to Narberal like a teacher.

When using magic to collect information, one had to protect oneself. This was basic knowledge.

When Ainz Ooal Gown PKed, they gathered as much information on the opposition as possible and then launched an ambush to swiftly decide the matter. Simply put, “the battle is over before it begins”, as stated by the guild member Punitto Moe in the text named “PKing for Dummies”.

Therefore, Ainz was now teaching these skills to Narberal, so they would have the advantage if they encountered other players in the future.

“—That’s basically it. The fact is, you still need to use skills to improve the effectiveness of your spells and defend yourself, but I don’t think we need to prepare so much against our enemy this time. After all, if the opposition was a magic caster who knew more spells to deal with the enemy, they wouldn’t have simply cast that level of spells on the corpses. Then, begin, Narberal.”

A relieved Narberal carefully opened a scroll and recited the name of the spell inscribed upon it.

A heatless flame engulfed the scroll, consuming it within seconds and releasing the magic locked within.

She did the same with all the other scrolls, and only after sheathing herself in countless protective spells did she finally cast [Locate Object]. After that, she pointed to a location on the map:

“There.”

Ainz could not understand the characters, and racked his brains for some clue as to where “there” was.

“…The graveyard, huh. As I thought, it wasn’t the sewers after all.”

E-Rantel was also a military base, and the graveyard was massive, almost the largest of its size. The spell pointed to the deepest reaches of the graveyard.

“I see. Then, use [Clairvoyance] next. Combine it with [Crystal Monitor] so I can see as well.”

Narberal activated the scrolls once more, and the image floating in mid-air revealed countless human shapes. However, their movements were oddly stiff. In addition, there were many inhuman objects within the image.

There was a boy in their midst. He was dressed strangely, but there was no mistake about him.

“So he’s definitely there. And the metal plates should be nearby…

hm, a big mass of undead?”

There was a group of undead around Nfirea. They were all low-tier undead, but they were present in surprising numbers.

“…What do you plan to do? Teleport in and wipe them all out at once? Or perhaps use flight magic to attack them from above?”

“Don’t be silly. Wouldn’t either of those methods mean that the problem gets solved without anyone knowing about it?”

Seeing that Narberal had no idea of what he was talking about, Ainz continued his explanation:

“Whoever created all these undead must have done so in preparation for something of earthshaking proportions. Therefore, if we save Nfirea and deal with that matter at the same time, it will greatly boost our reputations. If we do this on the quiet, we will only receive Lizzie’s payment, and we won’t be able to gain much fame from it.”

That said, if they did not take care of the situation quickly, there was a high chance that Nfirea might die. Even Ainz could not summon this many undead and control them, so there must have been some sort of trick at work here. Nfirea’s life might well be an important part of that trick.

That said, he wanted to know the secret of that trick, even if it cost Nfirea’s life.

The most important thing to Ainz was how to strengthen the Great Tomb of Nazarick. If he could do so by sacrificing Nfirea, then he would gladly pay that price.

“I’d like to collect more information, but our preparations and time won’t allow it,” Ainz muttered as he approached the door. After opening it, he shouted:

“Lizzie! We’re ready. We’re heading to the graveyard now!”

“What about the sewers?”

Lizzie’s voice came from far away, accompanied by the *patapata* of her running footsteps.

“The sewer is just a red herring which the author of this tragedy left for us. They’re actually in the graveyard, together with an army of undead. There’s easily thousands of them there.”

“What!”

Of course it was an estimate. How could he have counted all of them?

“No need to be shocked. We intend to cut a path through them. The problem is that we can’t guarantee that undead army won’t escape from the graveyard. You need to tell as many people as possible to hold the undead back if they see them spilling out. There’s no proof, but I’m sure that a lot of people will be willing to listen to a big name like you. If the undead ran wild and there was nobody stopping them… that would be troublesome, no?”

Ainz’s face twisted under his helmet.

If I don’t make a grand spectacle of this, it’ll be a pain. The more I heat this up, the more fame I’ll earn when I solve the problem. That’s why I’m doing this, after all.

“That’s all I have to say. Time is tight, so I’ll be heading over right now.”

“Do you have a way to break through that army of the dead?”

Ainz looked quietly at Lizzie, and then pointed to the greatswords on his back.

“Don’t you see it right here?”

Part 3

There was a place which occupied roughly a quarter of E-Rantel’s outer ring, which was also most of the western quadrant. It was E-Rantel’s communal cemetery. While other cities had their own graveyards, none of them were as big as this one.

This was in order to suppress the spawning of the undead.

Although many things were unclear about the spontaneous genesis of the undead, the basic idea was that vile creatures frequently spawned from the places where the living came to an end. Of these, people who died sudden, violent deaths and the dead who were not properly revered had the highest chance of coming back to unlife. Therefore, battlefields and ruins tended to be infested by the undead.

Since E-Rantel was very close to the Empire and consequently its battlefields, it required a huge graveyard — a place where remains could receive the proper veneration.

In this aspect, the neighboring country — the Empire — also adhered to their common agreement to respect the dead. Though they slaughtered each other, they both saw the undead that attacked the living as their common enemy.

In addition, there was another problem with the undead. If left unattended, the undead spawned more powerful undead. This was why the city guards and adventurers patrolled the graveyards day and night to exterminate the weaker undead as soon as possible.

A wall surrounded the graveyard. This wall was the boundary between the living and dead. While it was only four meters tall and could not compare to the city walls, it was wide enough for people to walk on top of it. The large doors set into its side were sturdy and could not be easily breached.

All this was in order to ward against the undead that spawned in the graveyard.

There were staircases to the left and right of the doors, and watchtowers along the length of the wall. The guards took turns observing the graveyard below them as they yawned from the watchtowers, in shifts of five men at a time.

The graveyard was lined with sconces enchanted with [Continual Light] spells, so there was ample illumination despite it being nighttime. Still, there were many shadowy places, and visibility was even worse in those places blocked by tombstones.

A spear-wielding guard absentmindedly looked out to the graveyard, and said to his yawning colleague:

“Tonight’s quite peaceful too.”

“Yup, there were only five Skeletons earlier, right? That seems a lot less compared to the past.”

“Hm, could it be the souls of the dead were called back by the Four Gods? That would be pretty lucky for us if it were true.”

The other guards were drawn in by the topic, and began speaking up:

“Well, if it’s just Skeletons and Zombies we can deal with them. Still, it’s a pain to take out Skeletons with a spear.”

“I think the most troublesome ones are the Wights.”

“For me it’s the Skeleton Centipedes. I’d be dead by now if the adventurers standing guard nearby didn’t chase them away from me.”

“Skeleton Centipedes? I heard that the powerful undead only show up when you let the weak ones get away. So all you need to do is kill them all when they’re weak and the strong undead won’t appear.”

“Yes, that’s right. The captain chewed out the squad patrolling the graveyard last week. While it’s nice to have them buy a round for us, I’d rather not have to go through that sort of thing again.”

“Still… when I think about it, I’ve got a bad feeling about the lack of undead right now.”

“…Why’s that?”

“Ah, I just feel like we might have missed something out during our watches.”

“You’re thinking too much. There aren’t that many undead normally. They say that they only pop up frequently when they bury the corpses of the people who died while fighting the Empire. So on the flip side, this is what happens when there aren’t any big wars, right?”

The soldiers nodded to each other in agreement. They had buried human corpses in their own villages, but they had never heard of the undead appearing that often.

“…So that means the Katze Plains must be pretty insane.”

“Yeah, didn’t they say something about an unimaginably strong undead creature showing up?”

It was a place where the Empire and the Kingdom clashed in fierce battles. It was also a place famous for the proliferation of its undead. Adventurers hired by the Kingdom and Imperial knights would often go there to hunt down the undead. This task was important enough that the Empire and Kingdom’s support corps had built small towns nearby to support their personnel.

“I heard—”

A guard who was about to speak suddenly shut his mouth.

Another guard, who felt easy about this, spoke up:

“Oi, don’t scare me—”:

“Quiet!”

The silent guard looked straight at the graveyard, as though he could see through the darkness. Following this, the other guards turned to look at the graveyard one after the other.

“…Didn’t you hear it?”

“Were you imagining things?”

“Though I didn’t hear the wind blowing or the grass moving… I think I can smell dirt. Didn’t they dig a few graves just now? It smells just like it did then…”

“Come on, don’t joke about this sort of thing.”

“…Eh? Ah, oi! Look over there!”

One of the guards pointed to the graveyard, and everyone else looked toward the spot he was pointing at.

Two guards were sprinting for the doors. Both of them panted heavily, their eyes bloodshot, and their sweat-slick hair stuck to their foreheads.

A growing sense of dread filled the other guards as they saw this.

Guard patrols in the graveyard moved in groups of at least ten. Why were there only two people here? Judging by the way they had no weapons and were running for dear life, they had panicked and fled.

“Open, open up! Hurry up and open the doors!”

Upon seeing the two men shouting in front of the doors, the guards hurriedly ran down the stairs and let them through.

Before the doors could even swing fully open, the two guards forced their way in. They collapsed to the ground but kept scrabbling on.

“What the hell …”

The two pale-faced guards who had just escaped the graveyard interrupted their questioners, panting and shouting:

“Close, close the doors! Quickly!”

This strange behavior sent a chill down the spine of the other guards. Working together, they pushed the doors shut and barred them.

“What happened? What about the others?”

As they heard this question, a haunted look appeared on the guards’ frightened faces:

“They, they were eaten by the undead!”

Upon realizing that eight of their fellows had lost their lives, the guards immediately turned to their captain. He immediately ordered:

“…Oi, one of you go upstairs and take a look!”

A guard hurriedly climbed the stairs, but halfway up, he froze in place.

“What, what happened?”

The trembling guard shouted:

“The undead! The undead are everywhere!”

If one listened carefully, they would be able to make out a sound which sounded like ten thousand horses galloping, coming from the other side of the wall. Everyone, not just the guard from just now, were struck dumb by the scene before them.

A massive quantity of undead — so great as to render all who saw it speechless — approached the doors of the graveyard.

“Why, in such numbers…”

“Looks like it’s more than one or two hundred… there should be a thousand of them… or more…”

The magical lights illuminated countless undead, like shadows writhing in the dark, and it was difficult to get an exact count.

Wreathed in the scent of rot, the shambling mass of undead pressed in toward the doors like gathering clouds. It was not just Zombies and Skeletons down there; there were also a few rarer and more powerful undead — Ghouls, Ghasts, Wights, Swell Skins, Corrupt Dead, and so on.

The guards could not help their shivering.

Because the graveyard was surrounded by a wall, the undead could not attack the common folk as long as the wall held out. However, even if they mobilized all their guards, it was doubtful whether they could fend off such a massive horde of the undead. The guards were essentially normal citizens, and they had no confidence in wiping out these undead.

In addition, some undead could turn their slain victims into others of their own kind. If things went poorly, the guards might end up becoming undead themselves and attacking their fellows. And while they had not seen any flying undead yet, the guards had a bad feeling — that if they did not wipe them all out, a flying undead creature would end up spawning sooner or later.

—The undead tide washed up against the side of the wall.

Doom. Doom.

The swarming, mindless undead had no sense of pain, and banged wildly against the doors. It was as if they knew that they could attack the living if they broke the doors down.

Doom. Doom.

The sounds of repeated pounding and the constant moans of the dead came from the other side of the door.

They did not need siege rams. The undead — who did not care if their bodies were destroyed by their non-stop battering — were siege weapons in their own right.

Cold sweat broke out on the backs of the guards who saw this.

“Ring the bell! Ask for help from the barracks! You two, go inform the other doors about this!”

The captain, who had recovered his senses by now, continued giving orders:

“The ones behind, take your spears and stab the undead getting close to the doors!”

The guards remembered their duty as they heard the orders, and they started thrusting savagely at the undead below them. The undead covered the land like a flood, so any stroke of theirs found a home in undead flesh.

Thrust, withdraw, thrust again.

Tainted blood spilled over the ground, while the guards’ noses were soon inured to the stench of decay. They repeated the same motions over and over again like workers. They killed several undead, which fell to the ground and were trampled to paste by the ones behind them.

Because the undead had little intelligence, they did not strike against the guards stabbing at them with their spears. Repeating the same simple actions eroded the guards’ sense of danger.

And then, as though aiming for that moment —

“Uwaaaaaaaah!”

A scream pierced the air. As the other guards turned to look, they saw something long and wriggly curled around another guard’s neck.

It was a slimy, pink object — an intestine.

The creature that had shot forth this length of intestine was an egg-shaped undead creature, with a huge cavity on the front of its body. Within that cavity were several people's’ worth of internal organs, churning and wriggling like parasites.

This undead creature was called an Organ Egg.

The writhing intestine pulled at the guard’s body.

“Hyaaaaaaa!”

Before his friends could save him, the guard wailed and fell—

“Save, save me! Someone save me! Agyaaaah!”

—His screams filled the air. Every guard saw the terrible fate of their colleague, eaten alive by the throng of undead.

The armor which protected his body and his attempts to protect his face only prolonged his suffering. His fingers, his calves, his face, all of them were picked clean.

“Fall back! Get down from the wall!”

After seeing the Organ Egg’s innards twitching, the guard captain ordered a retreat.

All the guards hurriedly ran down the stairs, and they could hear the sounds of the undead banging at the doors getting louder. The doors themselves began groaning under the strain.

The sense of doom grew stronger. The chances of them holding out until help arrived, or that no other strong undead would show up were very low. Once the doors opened, the tide of death would flood in, and only the gods knew how many lives would be lost.

Just as the guards were fully consumed by despair, there was a clattering of metal.

Everyone reflexively looked to the source of the sound.

Before their eyes was a magical beast whose round black eyes gleamed with intelligence, and a warrior in full plate armor. Beside them was a beautiful woman who seemed completely mismatched to the pair.

“O-oi! This place is very dangerous! Get out of—”

Halfway through the guard’s words, he realized that there was a metal plate dangling from the warrior’s neck.

An adventurer!

However, that ember of hope was snuffed out when he saw that it was a copper plate. Adventurers of the lowest class could not possibly deliver them from this dilemma. A look of disappointment appeared in the eyes of all the guards present.

The warrior nimbly dismounted his beast. There was no sense of clumsiness in his movements.

“Didn’t you hear me? Get out of here now!”

“Nabe, my sword.”

The warrior’s voice was softer than the guard’s shouting, but it was surprisingly resonant even through the clamor of the swarming undead. The beautiful woman approached the warrior, and drew a greatsword from his back.

“Look behind you. It’s dangerous, right?”

The guards turned around in response to the warrior's words, and they looked upon their doom.

They saw a shape which was taller than the four meter high walls.

It was a Necrosome Giant, a gigantic undead creature made of countless corpses.

"Uwaaaaah—"

Just as the guards screamed and prepared to flee, a strange sight appeared before them. The warrior from just now raised his sword in a javelin-thrower's stance.

What was he doing?

In the next moment, that question vanished like mist in sunlight.

The warrior hurled his sword with unbelievable speed. The guards hurriedly looked where the sword had flown, and there they saw an even more incredible sight.

The Necrosome Giant, that vast, seemingly invincible undead creature, staggered back like it had been hit in the head by an even larger foe, before collapsing to the ground. A thunderous crash provided the proof that the gigantic creature had been knocked down.

"—These undead are in the way."

With that, the dark warrior drew his other greatsword and advanced.

“Open up.”

The guards did not seem to have understood what the warrior said. They blinked several times before they finally managed to parse the warrior’s words.

“Don’t, don’t be foolish! There’s a whole crowd of undead on the other side of the door!”

“So? What does that have to do with me, Momon?”

Faced by the absolute confidence of the dark warrior, all of the guards were shaken to the core, and they could not respond.

“…Well, if you won’t open up, it can’t be helped. I’ll go over there myself.”

The warrior broke into a sprint and kicked off the stone floor, vanishing over the other side of the wall. He had leapt over a four meter high wall in a single bound, and while wearing full plate too.

It was a scene that barely seemed real at all.

The guards could not bring themselves to believe the events which had just occurred. Each of them continued staring slack-jawed at the place where Momon had been.

The beautiful woman floated into the sky from her original position. She looked like she would cross the wall like that, but then a voice halted her:

“A moment please! Please bring this one with you!’

The voice came from the mighty beast which the warrior from just now had ridden here. Its voice was as awe-inspiring as its appearance.

The beautiful girl’s brows furrowed slightly — not that it damaged her looks at all — and responded to the beast:

“…Climb the stairs over there. You should still be able to move after falling from a height like this, right?”

“Of course! This one must rush to his master’s side! Wait for this one, milord!”

The massive creature shot past the guards and nimbly bounded up the stairs. It hopped over the wall and landed on the other side.

Now all was silence.

They stared with open mouths and stunned eyes for a while, as though a typhoon had just swept past them. The first guard to recover spoke in a voice that trembled uncontrollably:

“Oi… do you hear it?”

“Hear what?”

“The sounds of the undead.”

Even though they strained their ears to listen, they could not hear anything. It was as though a veil of silence had been drawn across the land. The constant sound of the undead pounding on the doors from just now was nowhere to be found.

The frightened guards muttered:

“Oi, did that actually happen? That warrior… there were undead like that, and so many of them, and he broke right through them… went straight ahead.”

They were filled with equal parts shock and awe.

The reason why the noise had stopped was because the nearby undead had been drawn away by a new target. Given that the sound still had not returned, it implied that they were still fighting and had not returned.

This unbelievable scenario drew the guards to the top of the walls to satisfy their curiosity. They could not believe what they saw from up there, and they muttered:

“What is this… that warrior… what kind of a man is he…”

Countless bodies littered the ground. Mountains of corpses were everywhere, covering the entire graveyard. Although some of the undead hung on to a thread of unlife and struggled weakly to move, all of them had lost the ability to fight.

The smell of decay floated over as they expected, and they heard the sounds of distant battle.

“…No way… he’s still fighting? All these undead, strong ones too, and he could actually break through them! Incredible…!”

“Who was that warrior, anyway?”

“…He called himself Momon, I think… but calling someone with skills like that a copper-plate is too much of a joke. He should be one of those legendary adventurers with an adamantite plate, right?”

The others quietly voiced their approval. Someone like that could not be a mere copper-plate adventurer.

He should be someone who possessed a plate made of the highest-ranked of all metals — in other words, a hero.

There was no other possibility.

“We… perhaps we just saw a man of legend… a dark warrior… no, a dark hero…”

Everyone else could not help but nod in response to that.

♦♦♦

When his right hand moved, the undead were flung away. When his left hand struck, the undead were cut in two.

Ainz — a tornado of death which killed everything it touched — finally ground to a halt.

“What bothersome pests.”

Ainz had re-created his greatswords with magic, and now he held them in both hands. He looked on the undead around him with an exasperated expression on his face, and then pointed a greatsword caked in vile fluids at them.

The undead recoiled at this and tried to flee Ainz. The undead should not have known the meaning of fear, yet they had come to fear Ainz.

“…This one apologizes deeply for this one’s actions…”

The sound came from high above Ainz. The Wise King of the Forest floated in mid-air, limbs spread. Its whiskers drooped down and its voice sounded equally lifeless.

However, the person who responded was not Ainz.

“You… settle down up there. It’s hard to carry you when you squirm.”

Narberal’s voice came from the belly of the Wise King of the Forest. It was not flying, but rather Narberal, who had cast the flight spell on herself, was carrying it. She was halfway buried into the Wise King of the Forest’s fur.

“My deepest apologies…”

The unintelligent undead had not attacked Ainz when he appeared. This was because they could perceive life-force, and they sensed that Ainz was of the same kind as they.

However, the same did not apply to the life-force of the Wise King of the Forest behind him. This resulted in a chaotic battle which drew Ainz in, and the Wise King of the Forest was thus carried up by Narberal lest the undead touch it.

With every step Ainz took forward, the undead took one back. They encircled him in this way while keeping their distance from him.

This circle moved with Ainz’s steps. Although the undead seemed to be looking for a chance to attack, any who stepped forward were immediately destroyed by Ainz. Therefore, the undead merely surrounded him, but did not make a move on him.

Countless undead had already been annihilated by Ainz when they carelessly strayed too close to Ainz. Even the mindless undead had learned something from this, which was why they had chosen to surround him.

“Still, if this keeps up, it’ll only be a stalemate,” Ainz grumbled as he saw the huge throng of undead that still remained.

If he wanted to break the encirclement, he could easily cut a path through the undead horde. However, if he forced his way through, the undead would scatter in all directions and the nearby guards might end up being injured or killed. If that happened, he would lose the witnesses to his deeds, and thus fail the objective of being “the adventurer who cleared up this matter”. Therefore, he had to lure the undead to him as he moved forward, in order to ensure the safety of the guards. However, doing so made his forward progress very slow.

And then, Narberal responded in earnest to Ainz’s words:

“Should we summon reinforcements from Nazarick? A couple dozen people could annihilate everything in this graveyard that dares stand against you, Ainz-sama.”

“…Don’t be silly. How many times have I told you our objective for coming to this city?”

“But, Ainz-sama, if we wanted to win fame, would it not be better to let the undead surge into the city and cause more casualties first before stepping in?”

“I have considered that possibility as well. If we knew our enemy’s aim, this city’s fighting power and so on, we might be able to do that. But since we lack information, we need to avoid losing this chance. It would also be very annoying to have to dance to the opposition’s tune. In addition, from what I can see, other teams might snatch away our glory first.”

“I see… Ainz-sama, you are truly incredible. To think your plan was so immaculately conceived; as expected of our supreme ruler. I bow before your superior wisdom once more. Speaking of which… your foolish vassal would like to be enlightened on one point. Would it not be better to send the Eight Edge Assassins, Shadow Demons and other vassals adept at hiding themselves to observe the situation before a great shift in the circumstances occurs, and then seize the moment when it comes?”

Ainz silently looked at Narberal, who was floating in the air.

The night wind blew softly. Any undead who sought to exploit this perceived weakness would instead be destroyed in one hit by a swing of Ainz’s greatswords.

“…If, if I taught you everything, how would you learn? Figure it out yourself.”

“Yes! My deepest apologies.”

Ainz had been somewhat shaken by this. He forcefully jerked his head back to double check the distance between himself and the doors to the graveyard, and to see if the guards could still see him from there.

“However! That said, time is still getting quite tight. It can’t be helped — I guess I’ll have to carve a path through them.”

Ainz unleashed his power.

[Create Mid-Tier Undead: Jack the Ripper]. [Create Mid-Tier Undead: Corpse Collector].

After using his skill, two undead creatures appeared.

One of them was dressed in a trenchcoat and wore a mask which showed a smiling face. Its fingers ended in large, sharp surgical scalpels.

The other was a massive, brawny creature, but its body was covered in pustules and the bandages which wrapped its entire body were stained yellow. There were many metal hooks all over its body, linked by metal chains to just as many moaning skulls.

“Kill them.”

The two undead obeyed Ainz’s orders and laid into the surrounding undead horde. Though there were only two of them, they were stronger by far.

As Jack the Ripper severed limbs with each swipe of its scalpel hands and the Corpse Collector wrenched off the heads of the undead with its chains, Ainz continued using his skills.

“Then, let’s take care of things on this side too.”

Those skills were [Create Low-Tier Undead: Wraith] and [Create Low-Tier Undead: Bone Vulture]. After summoning several of them, he ordered:

“Chase away any intruders that enter the graveyard. Killing adventurers is fine, but do not kill the guards.”

The Wraiths’ bodies shimmered and vanished, and the Bone Vultures spread their wings and flew up. Now that his work was done, Ainz smiled to himself.

The low-tier undead were there just in case some adventurers used flight magic to reach the enemy’s location and steal the credit for his hard work.

“Then, let’s go.”

As the two summoned undead made a brutal display of their skills, Ainz charged into the greatly-thinned ranks of the undead horde.

♦♦♦

Only Narberal remained with Ainz by the time they reached the chapel at the heart of the graveyard. Several suspicious-looking fellows were standing in a circle in front of the chapel, apparently conducting some kind of ritual.

They all wore crude black robes which covered their entire bodies, and which varied in both texture and color. Their black head cloths hid their faces and only showed their eyes, while the wooden staves they carried had strange carvings on their ends.

They were short, and by the way they carried themselves, they were probably all men.

The only exposed face belonged to the man in the middle, and he looked like he was undead. He was well-dressed, and seemed to be concentrating on the black stone that he held in his hand.

The wind carried whispered words to Ainz's ears. The voices in the air rose and fell in unison, and it sounded like some sort of chanting. However, it did not sound like a requiem to the dead, but more like some sort of dark ritual which blasphemed against the deceased.

"Should we ambush them?" Narberal asked. However, Ainz shook his head.

"It wouldn't help. Besides, it seems they've already spotted us."

Ainz had no concealment-related skills, so he simply strode directly over to them. Although he could have avoided the lights of the graveyard, all the opposition would need to do was use "Darkvision" in order to see as though it were broad daylight. In addition, Ainz had personal experience of the fact that summoned monsters and their summoners were linked by a mental bond. Since he had defeated so many undead on the way here, they must have known that Ainz was approaching them through their bond.

In fact, there were already several people looking at Ainz and Narberal.

Given that they had not launched an attack yet, they might have something to say. Having come to that conclusion, Ainz decided to approach them head-on.

As Ainz and Narberal walked below the magical lights, the suspicious group of people took a stance, and one of them said to the man in the center: “Khazit-sama, they’re here.”

All right, idiot confirmed… no, he might have been faking it. First, let’s listen to what they have to say.

“Ah… what a lovely night. Don’t you think it’s wasted on a boring old ritual?”

“Hmph… I’ll decide whether the time is right for a ritual. Come to think of it, who are you, anyway? How did you break through that horde of undead?”

The man standing in the center of the circle — his name was Khazit, unless that was an alias, and he was probably the highest-ranked of all the people present — asked Ainz that question on behalf of the others.

“I’m an adventurer on an assignment, looking for a missing young man… I trust you know who I’m talking about, even if I don’t state his name?”

The other members of the group took a stance, which confirmed in Ainz’s heart that they were not innocents who had been dragged into the matter.

Under his helmet, Ainz smiled bitterly at Khazit, who was looking around the surroundings.

“Just the two of you? Where’s the rest of your party?”

Oi oi, what kind of question is that? Or maybe he’s trying to see if there’s anyone lying in ambush… still, he should have thought a little before opening his mouth. Based on that, I can be sure he’s just a pawn.

Ainz tiredly shrugged as he replied:

“Yup, just the two of us. We flew over here with a flight spell.”

“You’re lying, that’s impossible.”

Ainz sensed that there was some kind of meaning behind that curt retort. Thus he asked:

“You don’t have to believe it, but let’s get back to the main topic. If you let the boy return home safely, I can spare your life. How about it, Khazit?”

Khazit glared at the foolish disciple who had blurted out his name.

“—And you are?”

“Before that, there’s something I’d like to ask. Is there anyone over there besides you lot?”

Khazit looked coldly at Ainz:

“We’re the only ones—”

“—Surely it’s not just you? There should be someone with a piercing weapon among you… planning to ambush us? Or are you hiding because you’re afraid?”

“Fufu~ You checked their bodies~ Not bad~”

Suddenly, a female voice rang out from the chapel.

A young woman slowly emerged into the light, and every step she took was accompanied by the clattering of metal against metal.

“You…”

“Ahhh~ they found me out, so there’s no point hiding. Speaking of which~ I only hid because I can't use the [Conceal Life] spell~"

The woman grinned, in response to the somewhat angered Khazit.

That reply aside, they still haven't trotted out Nfirea as a hostage. Perhaps Nfirea's already dead…

Just as Ainz was thinking along those lines, the woman asked:

"May I know your name? Ah, I'm Clementine. Pleased to meetcha~"

"…Well, it's kind of pointless to answer your question, but I guess I'll tell you anyway. My name is Momon."

"I've never heard that name before… how about you?"

"I haven't heard of it myself — and I've gathered information on all the high-ranked adventurers in the city, so how is it I've never heard of a Momon among them? Still, how did you know it was here? The dying message pointed to the sewers—"

"The answer is under your cloak. Show me."

"Uwah~ Pervert~ Lewd~"

As she said that, the girl's — Clementine's — face twisted. She had a grin so wide it nearly reached her ears.

“Ju~st kidding~ you mean these?”

Clementine threw open her coat, revealing what looked like scale mail whose individual plates had mismatched components. However, Ainz’s excellent vision saw the truth immediately. Those were not the metal plates which made up scale mail.

They were countless adventurer plates. Platinum, gold, silver, iron, copper, even mithril and orichalcum. All these were the proof of all the adventurers Clementine had been killing, the trophies taken from her hunts. Innumerable vengeful groans seemed to haunt the metal plates’ clinking.

“It was these prizes of yours which led me to you.”

A look of confusion came over Clementine, and Ainz did not intend to explain himself.

“…Nabe. Deal with Khazit and the other men. I’ll take care of this woman.”

With that, he quietly warned Nabe to watch out above.

“Understood.”

Khazit’s expression was somewhere between a sneer and a grin. The cold-eyed Narberal, on the other hand, showed nothing on her face.

“…Clementine, let’s kill each other over there.”

Ainz immediately set out without waiting for Clementine to respond. He was very confident that she would not reject the challenge, and the sound of her lazy footsteps behind him was ample proof of that.

Once they had gotten some distance away, a thunderous, eye-wateringly bright discharge of lightning erupted between Narberal and Khazit. As though on cue, Ainz and Clementine turned to look at each other.

“Could it be those people I killed in that store were your friends? Are you mad because I killed your buddies~?”

Clementine continued in a mocking tone:

“Ufufufu, that magic caster was soooo funny. Until the end he believed that someone would save him~ but how could he hold out that long against my attacks with just that little bit of health… Or could it be he was hoping you would save him? Sor~ry, I killed him.”

Clementine was all smiles. Ainz looked at her, and shook his head.

“…No, there’s no need to apologize.”

“Really? Well that’s a shame~ It’s fun to piss off those people who get all emotional when their friends come up. Oi, why aren’t you getting mad? You’re no fun! Or could it be they weren’t your friends?”

“…Well, under the right circumstances, I might have done the same thing as you. So blaming you for it would be hypocritical.”

Ainz slowly raised his greatswords:

“…Still, they were tools for building my reputation. Once they returned to the inn, they would have spread word of my deeds to the other adventurers. They would have told everyone about how the two of us were heroes who drove off the Wise King of the Forest by ourselves. And now you’ve gotten in the way of my plans. That greatly displeases me.”

Clementine seemed to have sensed something in Ainz’s tone, and she laughed uncontrollably:

“Really now~ oh woe is me, to have made you mad~ oh yes, it was a poor decision to fight me~ That pretty girl’s a magic caster, right? Then she won’t be able to beat Khazi-chan~ though if you two swapped out, maybe you could have won. Though that girl couldn’t beat me either~”

“Nabe alone would be more than enough for you.”

“Don’t be silly~ how could a measly little magic caster beat me? It’ll be over in two or three blows~ It’s always been like that~”

“I see, so you’re that confident in your abilities as a warrior…”

“Yup, it goes without saying. No warrior in this country can beat me~ no, wait, almost no warrior in this country can beat me~”

“Is that so… well, that gave me an idea. I shall give you a handicap, and have my revenge on you at the same time.”

Clementine’s eyes narrowed, and for the first time she had a look of annoyance on her face.

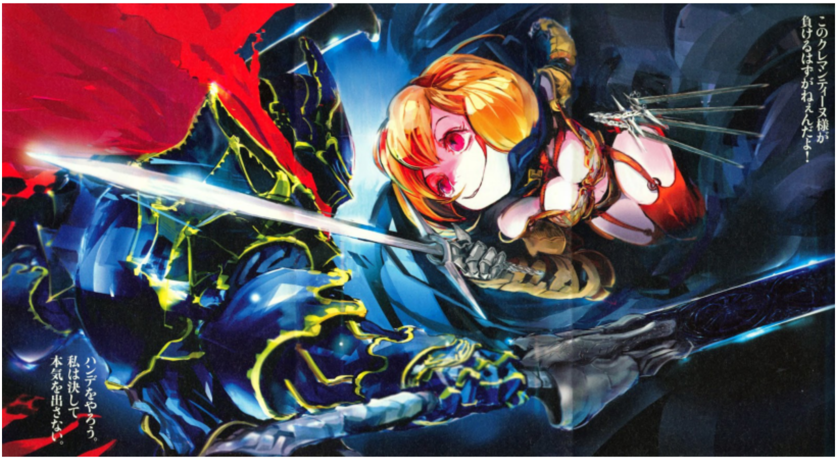
“According to the info from those chaps in the Windflower, there’s only five people in this country who can give me a good fight. Gazef Stronoff. Gagaran of Blue Rose. Luisenburg Albelion of Red Drop. Brain Unglaus. Also, the retired Vestia Croft Di Lofan… though none of them could beat me even if they went all-out. Not even if I was without the magic items from my country.”

Clementine smiled to Ainz. That smile was a disgusting one.

“I don’t know what sort of ugly face is under that helmet of yours, but there’s no way that I, Clementine-sama — one who’s left humanity behind and stepped into the realm of heroes — could possibly lose!”

In contrast to the agitated Clementine, Ainz’s reply was calm and composed.

“Because of that, I will give you a handicap. Under no circumstance will I use my full strength on you.”


このクレマンティーヌ様が負けるはずがねぇんだよ！
ハンデをやろう。私は決して本気を出さない。

Part 4

“[Twin Maximize Magic - Electrosphere].”

Two balls of lightning, each nearly twice the normal size, appeared in Narberal’s open palms and shot forth—

—And then they struck.

The electrospheres — their destructive power greatly augmented — expanded rapidly. The electrical pulse that spread from them was huge and lit the graveyard as if it was in broad daylight. The magical lightning vanished as quickly as it had appeared, taking its power with it.

All of Khazit’s minions were on the ground.

Only one person remained standing.

“Really… why didn’t you fall like those other inferior lifeforms (caterpillars)… Could it be that you cast the [Energy Immunity - Electricity] spell?” Narberal asked as she noticed the faint burn marks on Khazit’s face.

If those were there, then he should have cast [Protection Energy - Electricity], a lower-tiered defensive spell than [Energy Immunity - Electricity].

Narberal felt it was a shame that she could not exterminate all the pests in one go, and then she consoled herself with the thought that all this was still within acceptable parameters. After all, it would have been boring to have finished everything off with just one spell.

“You aren’t just a regular idiot, but an idiot who can cast 3rd-tier spells, aren’t you?!”

“…An idiot? An inferior lifeform (mite) like yourself dares call me an idiot?!”

Narberal wrinkled her eyebrows.

“Anyone who makes a mess of my plans is an idiot. Especially an idiot who doesn’t know the meaning of strength and came here to find their death! My preparations are finally complete! Now behold the supreme power of the Orb of Death that has drunk its fill of negative energy!”

Khazit raised the orb in his hand.

It was a fairly rough-looking gem that gleamed like a lump of blackened steel. It had not been polished and it looked more like a lump of ore than anything which had been manufactured. Narberal sensed something like a heartbeat coming from the Orb.

Suddenly, the six disciples of Khazit who had been electrocuted by the [Electrosphere] climbed to their feet, but those were not the motions of a living, thinking creature. The six disciples were now under necromantic control, and shakily drew themselves up between Narberal and Khazit. Narberal watched the scene before her with doubt and puzzlement in her eyes.

“These zombies are my opponents?”

“Fuhahahaha, that’s right. But they’ll be enough for you! Attack!”

Zombies, being the least among the undead, could not use magic, and as the half-dozen former disciples lunged at her with claws outstretched, Narberal cast a spell on them.

“[Electrosphere].”

Once more a white globe shot forth. Where it struck, it generated a pulse of electricity which consumed all the disciples within its radius. The lightning vanished after a moment, and the disciples collapsed to the ground once more. Although she had easily dispatched her enemy, there was no joy on Narberal’s face.

[Create Undead] could not produce multiple undead at once. This must have been the result of Khazit using some sort of support skill.

Narberal turned her gaze to the black sphere in Khazit’s hand. It would seem the power of that item extended to letting him control multiple Zombies at once.

Still, this man had some nerve calling an effect like that “supreme power”. To Narberal, the rulers of the Great Tomb of Nazarick, the 41 Supreme Beings who had created her and all her comrades, were the only entities who deserved to be described as “supreme”.

Just as unhappiness filled Narberal, Khazit exclaimed in delight.

“That’s enough! You’ve taken in more than enough negative energy!”

The black sphere in Khazit’s hand drew the graveyard’s darkness into itself, and it seemed to be glowing faintly. The slow heartbeat she felt from earlier seemed stronger than before.

It would seem that ignoring it would be problematic in the future.

Having come to that conclusion, Narberal was about to make a move when she heard something. It was the sound of something whistling through the air. Narberal recalled her master’s warning and flung herself to the side.

A massive creature rushed past Narberal’s body, and after hovering behind Khazit, it landed on the ground.

It was a composite entity that stood three meters tall, made of countless human bones. It was designed to resemble a being with a very long neck, wings and four legs — a Dragon. Its tail, also made from innumerable bones, lightly thumped the ground.

This was the monster known as a Skeletal Dragon.

Narberal did not consider monsters of its level strong, but the Skeletal Dragon had a trait which was very dangerous to Nabe.

For the first time, a look of surprise appeared on Narberal’s face, which then stiffened up.

“Fuhahahaha!”

Khazit’s mad laughter echoed through the surroundings.

“Skeletal Dragons and their absolute immunity to magic are a magic caster’s worst nightmare, aren’t they?!”

If Nabe could not hurt the Skeletal Dragon with magic, then—

Her master had ordered her to carry a sword with her in case of emergencies. She now removed it from her belt — along with its sheath — and then secured her sword so it would not easily slip out of the sheath.

“—I’ll beat you to death.”

Narberal strode forth.

The Skeletal Dragon swiped its forepaw in response, but Narberal nimbly evaded its attack. The wind of its passing tossed up Narberal’s hair as she rushed in at the Skeletal Dragon’s chest.

Then, she concentrated all her strength and swung with all her force.

Her blow sent the three meter tall Skeletal Dragon flying.

Shortly afterwards, it hit the ground with an earth-shaking crash.

“What?!”

Khazit’s jaw dropped as he stared.

Skeletal Dragons were made of many smaller bones, and they certainly looked light. However, they only appeared light. Magic casters, who spent their days pursuing greater magic power, should not have had enough strength to pull off a move like that.

Khazit hurriedly fled behind the Skeletal Dragon’s vast body, and then he shouted:

“—You, who are you? A mithril…no, an orichalcum-ranked adventurer?! There shouldn’t be anyone like that in this city; did you pursue Clementine or myself to this place?!”

Khazit grit his teeth in agitation.

“Well, panicking like this does suit an inferior lifeform (click beetle) like yourself.”

“You, you!”

Crafting this Skeletal Dragon had required two months of elaborate rituals and an immense quantity of negative energy. How could it be beaten so easily? He had worked and planned many years for this.

Just as Khazit was turning red with rage, the Skeletal Dragon creaked as it slowly got up. There was a massive fissure in the bones which formed its chest, which spilled bone fragments as it moved. It could not take another hit like this.

“No! I won’t! I won’t let you! [Ray of Negative Energy]!”

A beam of black light shone extended from Khazit’s hand and touched the Skeletal Dragon, quickly healing its injuries with negative energy.

“So it’s immune to magic, but it can be healed with magic.”

Khazit ignored Narberal’s mockery and continued casting spells.

“[Reinforce Armor], [Lesser Strength], [Undead Flame], [Shield Wall].”

He cast buff after buff on the Skeletal Dragon.

Now the Skeletal Dragon’s bony body was sturdier, stronger, and wreathed in life-draining black fire. It even had an invisible barrier in front of it which acted like a shield.

“Well, if you’re doing that, I’ll play along.”

“[Reinforce Armor], [Shield Wall], [Protection Energy - Negative].”

Narberal layered defensive spells on herself as well.

Once both sides had finished buffing themselves, it was as if a bell had gone off and the two of them went at it again.

♦♦♦

Narberal swung her sword.

She landed a forceful hit on the Skeletal Dragon’s foreleg, but then Narberal furrowed her brows.

Although she could easily strike her opposition like just she had earlier, this was hardly a good matchup for her. She was not skilled at melee combat and her weapon was not suitable for it either.

The Skeletal Dragon was made of an assembly of bones, so piercing and slashing weapons did very little damage to it. However, Narberal did not have bludgeoning weapons, which were ideal for the task, so she had to resort to using her sheath. Although she had the advantage, the poor balance of the improvised weapon meant she could not effectively damage the Skeletal Dragon.

Perhaps a specialized warrior might have been able to maintain his balance, but Narberal was a magic caster and did not know how to do so.

The Skeletal Dragon’s forepaw swiped over the crouching Narberal. Though it missed her with its kick, the black flames wreathing its limbs washed over Narberal. However, she resisted them with the

[Protection Energy - Negative] spell, and the black flames vanished without a trace.

If she had not protected herself, she would probably have been hurt by the additional effects of the blow even if she had avoided it.

“[Ray of Negative Energy].”

Khazit healed the Skeletal Dragon’s wounds with a magic ray.

This was also one of the reasons why Narberal was frowning. No matter how much damage she did, Khazit the backliner immediately healed it all. She knew she had to attack Khazit first, but the Skeletal Dragon between Narberal and Khazit did not permit her to do so.

Even a piercing spell like [Lightning] would be stopped by the Skeletal Dragon’s magic immunity. The area-effect spell [Electrosphere] would also be stopped by Khazit’s defensive magic, its damage reduced to insignificance.

Then, perhaps by using an enchantment-type spell, she could force him to lower his defenses and win the encounter in one stroke —

“[Charm Person].”

“[Mind of Undeath].”

Narberal and Khazit cast their spells at the same time. Narberal directed a spell which would charm humans at Khazit, while Khazit cast a defensive spell on himself which protected him from mind-affecting spells.

In the end — Khazit smiled triumphantly, while Narberal frowned and clicked her tongue.

Perhaps she had been distracted by Khazit’s smile, but a shadow appeared over Narberal’s face.

A white object filled Narberal’s field of vision.

—She would be hard-pressed to avoid it.

She deftly ducked her head and braced the tip of her sword against her shoulder, turning her sword into a shield. The impact spread through her sword arm and the shoulder which took the blow, practically numbing her entire body and tossing Narberal’s body into the air.

This was the result of the Skeletal Dragon aiming a tail swipe at her face.

“Ohohoho.”

Though her balance had been broken, Narberal had not fallen down, her legs skilfully braced against the impact. Still, she had been driven back.

This was a good chance for a follow-up attack, but the Skeletal

Dragon remained where it was. Its job was to protect Khazit, and so it could not stray too far from him. After sensing this from the Skeletal Dragon, Narberal shook her hands to clear off the numbness and soreness.

Just then, Khazit poked his head out from behind the Skeletal Dragon —

“[Acid Javelin].”

“[Lightning].”

Khazit launched a green, spear-like object that streaked towards Narberal’s body. The javelin, which should have dealt her acid damage, stopped several centimeters away from Narberal’s body and vanished without a trace. At the same time, the lightning bolt Narberal shot from her fingers was blocked by the Skeletal Dragon’s tail and fizzled out.

Khazit and Narberal glared at each other.

“…A defensive spell? How annoying.”

“…That should be my line, you inferior lifeform (bagworm moth). How about coming out from behind there and facing me fair and square?”

“And why do I have to come out?”

“Doesn’t staying here ruin your plans?”

Khazit knew that Narberal had his number and narrowed his eyes. Narberal smiled nonchalantly.

“…It can’t be helped.”

After making his decision, Khazit clutched the strange sphere and raised it to the heavens.

“Now behold the power of the Orb of Death!”

The earth trembled, and Narberal’s body shook as well. This was a sign that something big was coming.

A massive fissure appeared in the ground, and a white monster slowly revealed itself.

“…Another one.”

“Hmph! The negative energy’s depleted now, but after I kill you and your friend, I can spread death throughout the city and recover it all!”

Khazit’s shouting was angry and emotional, in contrast to the unfazed Narberal.

“Hyaah.”

Narberal forcefully exhaled, then sprinted forward with preternatural speed. Khazit was taken by surprise and could not react in time.

The Skeletal Dragons stomped at Narberal, who had entered their attack range, with their forelegs.

Narberal turned and evaded the stomp of the Skeletal Dragon on her right, but the other one was waiting for her. It swept its tail along the ground, like it was going to scythe the grass.

The tail which had nearly hit her thundered through the air in front of Narberal as she leapt a long way back. Then, the tail suddenly changed its direction, swinging down on Narberal, who had just jumped clear.

Narberal avoided the earthshaking blow from the left, but the Skeletal Dragon on the right swiped its forepaw at her as well.

“Guhhh!”

She raised her sword to block the Skeletal Dragon’s swipe. Although the paw’s crushing pressure was extraordinary, Narberal still stood strong underneath it, and even forced it away. The right-side Skeletal Dragon stumbled several steps back, causing a brief lull in the action.

“…What *are* you? Blocking it without martial arts… how did you learn to do that?!”

“It is because I was created by the ones who are greater than the gods, the Supreme Beings.”

“Are you kidding me?!”

“Even if you knew the truth, you would never understand, and to think you would go so far as to to call me, one who spoke the name of the Supreme Beings, an idiot… this is why I say human beings are inferior lifeforms (planarians).”

Narberal turned a keen glare on Khazit. It was a cold, piercing stare that made him want to back away from her.

The frightened Khazit gave an order, as though to wipe away his fear.

“Skeletal Dragons, get her!”

The Skeletal Dragons kept within range of Khazit and made their move.

Narberal evaded the attack of one of the Skeletal Dragons and moved to close in, but she was forced to avoid the other Skeletal Dragon’s attack and missed her chance. This back and forth played out for quite a while, until a decisive blow was struck.

“[Acid Javelin].”

Narberal subconsciously turned her head and avoided the magical javelin headed at her face.

That was a grave mistake. The attack would not have done anything even if it had hit, so she could have safely ignored it. However, it came right at her, so she evaded it by reflex. This was a mistake that only a magic caster, who had not improved their close combat ability, would make.

That mistake had grave consequences.

Whoosh! Narberal's field of view changed dramatically as an ear-splitting impact rang out. She was tossed to the side.

She experienced a brief period of weightlessness before falling heavily to the ground. Her left arm had taken a tail sweep from one of the Skeletal Dragons. The non stop spinning disoriented her and she had no idea where she was.

Her body was protected by all manner of defensive spells, so there was no pain. However, the two Skeletal Dragons raised their forelegs over Narberal.

One might say she was out of options — normally speaking.

“Surrender, and I'll spare your life. How about it?”

A sadistic grin bloomed on Khazit's face, as he assured himself of his impending victory.

Of course, Khazit was not going to spare her. That look on his face was the kind that looked forward to the girl begging for mercy before he trampled her pathetic form.

Narberal, who had raised her torso off the ground, was so furious that her face was twisted up.

“…erable… human…”

“…What?”

Narberal looked Khazit in the eye and said:

“You miserable little human being. How dare you utter such nonsense, you pile of trash.”

Khazit’s eyes went wide and he shuddered with rage, and he gave the order to finish her off.

“Destroy her, Skeletal Dragons!”

The two dragons raised their forelegs, and Narberal smiled.

The words of the man she revered had reached her ears. She would hear him, no matter how far away his voice was.

“Narberal Gamma! Display the power of Nazarick!”

“…Understood. Then, I shall no longer face you as Nabe, but as Narberal Gamma.”

The Skeletal Dragons brought their forelegs down, intending to crush Narberal’s body beneath their forepaws. At the very last moment, Narberal cast a spell before being reduced to paste.

“[Teleportation].”

Narberal’s field of vision immediately changed.

She was now about 500 meters in the air.

Without wings to keep her aloft, Narberal plummeted toward the ground.

The wind shear roared across her body and the ground drew close. Narberal laughed:

“[Fly].”

Her rate of descent slowed and then stopped, until Narberal hung in the air, looking down on the battlefield from just now. Khazit and the two Skeletal Dragons looked around in shock, as Narberal was nowhere to be found.

♦♦♦

“Haaah~ I’m tired~”

Clementine’s flighty words filtered into Ainz’s ears.

They had been fighting for several minutes, but Ainz’s greatswords had not once touched Clementine.

“Speaking of which~ that’s some amazing physical ability you’ve got there~ you might even be proud of it~ buuut~”

Her expression turned into a predatory grin.

“—Are you stupid? You’re just swinging your swords with raw strength and speed, wildly swiping around like a kid with a stick. You might have a sword in each hand, but if you don’t know how to use them, then sticking to one sword would be wiser. Aren’t you taking the warrior business a little too lightly?”

“Come at me, then. Haven’t you been doing nothing but dodging since just now? It won’t be good for you if you drag this out for too long, no?”

Ainz chuckled coldly as he replied to her.

Clementine furrowed her brows. He had her there — Clementine had not attacked Ainz.

Instead, she had been dodging his attacks, and that was because

Ainz’s extraordinary physical attributes did not give her an opening to attack.

Things were not as easy for Clementine as she had claimed. She was beginning to feel angry at herself for not being able to take the initiative and strike.

“You said no warrior could beat you, right? Where’s that confidence of yours fled to?”

“…”

Clementine finally went to her weapons after Ainz taunted her. She had four of the piercing weapons called stilettos at her waist, as well as a morningstar. Right now, she drew one of those stilettos.

With his superhuman eyesight, Ainz verified that the morningstar was covered in detritus that looked like blood and chunks of flesh. Ainz tightened his grip on the greatswords in his hands as he stared down Clementine.

Just as both sides were about to strike, the earth shook.

Ainz could not take his eyes away from Clementine, who had taken a fighting stance. He sneaked a glance to the side, and saw that there were two gigantic dragon-shaped monsters made of bone where Narberal was fighting.

“…Skeletal Dragons… huh?”

“Cor-rect~ Looks like you do know a thing or two. Yup~ they’re the bane of any magic caster.”

“I see. So that’s why Nabe can’t win.”

“In~deed it is,” Clementine replied in a mocking tone of voice. She seemed to have regained her composure after the Skeletal Dragons showed up. Ainz furrowed his illusory brows under his helmet.

It was true that Skeletal Dragons were tricky opponents for magic casters, and now there were two of them. Narberal as she was now could not possibly beat them.

As though sensing the agitation in Ainz’s heart, Clementine shifted slightly.

This was a move that was intended to seal off his movements, so there would probably be a follow-up to it. When one saw a weakness in a powerful opponent, it would be natural to take the chance and attack.

Ainz cast all thoughts of Narberal from his mind and thrust forth the greatsword in his left hand in an intimidating manner. It was a feint as he slowly raised the greatsword in his right hand in preparation for a powerful strike.

Clementine’s weapons were a piercing type, and they could not execute complex attacks like slashing weapons could. They were weapons that were optimized for charges. In addition, stilettos were slender and were certainly not strong enough to survive a clash with greatswords.

Because of that, Ainz used his left-hand greatsword to keep her at bay, waiting for Clementine to close in. However, Clementine knew what he was up to.

“Do you have any way to close this gap?”

“I wonder~”

Clementine had a smug, self-assured look on her face as she responded in her usual self-assured tone. All of this pointed to the fact that she had something up her sleeve.

Clementine slowly changed her posture, lowering herself into what seemed like a runner’s crouch. However, her body was still upright, so she looked very strange. It might have appeared comical, but this was definitely not the sort of stance one could take lightly.

And then — Clementine moved. Before Ainz’s vigilant eyes, Clementine shot out like a fully compressed spring.

She sprinted right at him.

It was a charge that even Ainz, with his superhuman physical abilities, could hardly believe was possible.

Like a hurricane that devoured everything in its path, Clementine closed the distance between them in an instant. She slid under the greatsword Ainz was holding out, her physical dexterity allowing her to maintain her full speed as she moved.

Ainz — who was shaken by Clementine's serpentine movements — forcefully swung his right-hand sword. The powerful stroke ripped through the air as it surged toward Clementine, promising unimaginable devastation if he connected.

And in that brief instant, Ainz saw the face-splitting grin on her face get even wider.

“[Invulnerable Fortress].”

The unbelievable sight took Ainz aback.

The slender stiletto had actually blocked a hit from a greatsword that was more than ten times its mass.

The stiletto should have snapped under the grand strike it had just blocked head-on. Even if it had remained intact by some miracle, it would have been knocked flying. However, it was Ainz's greatsword which bounced away, like it had struck some ridiculously strong castle wall.

As though throwing herself into a lover's embrace, Clementine rushed toward Ainz's unguarded chest. In that moment, half of Ainz's field of view was taken up by the grinning Clementine.

Ainz retreated, but his opponent was faster. This attack, which combined a full-tilt charge, all her strength and skilful use of momentum, could be described as “meteoric”.

There was a flash of light, and then the screeching of metal clashing with metal rang through the graveyard.

Clementine ducked the wild swing of Ainz’s left-hand sword and then sprang clear.

Ainz knew the secret behind Clementine’s flashy moves.

“—Martial arts, huh!?”

These were techniques which did not exist in YGGDRASIL. They could be said to be a warrior’s magic — and they were things of which he had to be wary.

Its effect seemed to be to defend against his greatsword hit and neutralize the weapon's impact. She must have used martial arts to deflect Ainz’s attack.

“…So haaaard~ what’s that armor of your made of? Adamantite… hm?”

Although he did not feel pain, he felt that something sharp had pierced his left shoulder, near the place where he had heard the sound of scraping.

Ainz glanced to the shoulder from where the impact had come, but there was only a slight dent in the armor. Although the armor had no special magical properties, it was still the product of a level 100 magic caster's spells. The armor's hardness increased with its creator's level, so the fact that there was a dent in the armor was testament to the destructive power of Clementine's strikes.

"Ah well. If that's the case, next time~ hmm, maybe I should hit somewhere with thinner armor~ although I wanted to wear your down bit by bit, then sloooowly torment you once you couldn't move~ what a shame, what a shame."

Ainz realised that Clementine had not been wildly attacking his shoulders, but aiming to disable his arms in order to render him incapable of attacking. For the first time, Ainz felt something like respect toward Clementine the warrior.

All Ainz could do was simply swing his swords and deal damage to the enemy. Of course, if he could hit at all, the enemy would assuredly be slain. However, against a skilled opponent, he had to carefully consider the flow of the battle.

This has been good training for me…

"Mmm, then I'm coming~"

Just as Ainz was admiring Clementine, she took that strange stance she had assumed from just now. In response, Ainz raised his right-hand greatsword to meet the attack. This time, however, he did not thrust forth his left-hand greatsword.

Clementine snorted at Ainz's stance and sprinted. She was so fast that even Ainz and his incredible dynamic vision could barely follow her. If she had not rushed straight at him, he might have lost track of her movements.

In the face of Clementine's full-tilt charge, like an ominous arrow headed straight at him, Ainz swung his right-hand greatsword, launching an attack of his own to intercept her—

"[Invulnerable Fortress]."

—The swing was deflected by the same martial art as before, but he had already predicted this. Ainz had lost his balance in the previous exchange because he had put all his strength into the blow, so this time, he did not use as much force.

Ainz absorbed the radiating impact — as though he had struck a wall — with the strength of his arm, and then he swung his left-hand greatsword. This time, Ainz was fully confident that his foe could not block another full power hit.

However, even faster than that, Clementine used another martial art.

"[Flow Acceleration.]"

This martial art had a startling effect.

It felt as though someone had used time-controlling magic to slow time down. Everything moved slowly, as though immersed in some highly viscous fluid. The speed of Ainz’s swing slowed to a crawl.

However Clementine moved at the same speed in this decelerated world. She effortlessly dodged Ainz’s counterattack and approached Ainz from the front.

This might have been some sort of misperception on Ainz’s part. The magic rings which Ainz wore should have protected him from temporal attacks and attacks designed to impede his freedom of movement — although there might be some unknown factor at work here.

He must have felt like she had accelerated all of a sudden because his battle with Clementine was so intense. The important thing was that Ainz had seen this martial art before, but he had not felt the same way back then.

“Gaze—”

Gazef Stronoff had used this technique before.

Before he could finish speaking the name, her stiletto stabbed at him. It was aimed at one of Ainz’s eyes, through the narrow vision slit of his helmet.

Ainz forcefully jerked his head to the side, and while he managed to evade the stiletto thrust, the sound of metal shrieking against metal echoed through his helmet. Before he could breathe a sigh of relief that he had avoided the worst of it, he glimpsed Clementine readying her stiletto for another attack out of the corner of his eye.

“Cheh!”

Even after factoring in the differences in their physical abilities, Clementine’s straight-line thrust was faster than the circular swing of Ainz’s greatsword. This time, the stiletto struck home, hitting Ainz dead on.

“Hm—?”

“Guh!”

A surprised voice and a panicked voice hit the air at the same time.

Ainz pressed his greatsword against his helmet and jumped far back, but there was no follow-up attack.

Clementine glanced at Ainz’s unsightly retreat, then looked curiously at the tip of her stiletto. With a mocking laugh, she said:

“That’s enough of that handicap stuff. If you don’t go all-out you’re going to die~”

And then, to clear up her own doubts, Clementine continued asking the silent Ainz:

“Still, how did you do it? I know I hit you, but you’re fine. I thought I would have hurt you with that~”

“…Good grief. I’ve… learned a lot from this battle. First, about these things called martial arts, and also, the fact that I can’t swing my swords around blindly during combat, and the importance of maintaining my balance while attacking.”

“…Hah? Are you an idiot? If you’ve only learned that now… then you’re a failure as a warrior. Oh well, it doesn’t matter since you’re going to die here~ though I’d like an answer to my question… was it some sort of defensive martial art~?”

Clementine’s tone showed that she had had it with Ainz. He, on the other hand smiled bitterly under his helmet, because he agreed with what she had said.

“No, you’re right. I really am unskilled… you have my thanks. Although, since time is tight, playtime is now over.”

Paying no heed to the doubt on Clementine’s face, Ainz shouted at the top of his voice:

“Narberal Gamma! Display the power of Nazarick!”

He swivelled the sword hilts in his hands and then stabbed the points of both his greatswords into the ground. Ainz extended his empty hands before him, and gently beckoned Clementine over.

“Now then, come at me with the intent to die.”

♦♦♦

“…So, you can use the [Fly] spell, looks like you’re not bluffing. Although, how did you avoid that last hit? I didn’t see you behind the Skeletal Dragons…”

That puzzled question reached Narberal, who was slowly descending from the heavens. Khazit had no idea why she had not used the [Fly] spell to escape. She could have done so when encountering the Skeletal Dragons, but she had not. It baffled him.

“Hmph, you think you can win? Against Skeletal Dragons, who are immune to magic?”

“There are any number of ways to win… but before that…”

Narberal grabbed at her shoulder and pulled off her robe.

“Rejoice, inferior lifeform (human). You have the honor of doing battle with Narberal Gamma, one of the battle maids (Pleiades) who are the loyal servants of Ainz Ooal Gown, the absolute ruler of the Great Tomb of Nazarick.”

Her equipment was completely different. She now wore gauntlets and greaves of gold, silver and black metal, as well as a set of maid-themed armor which looked like it had come out of a manga. In place of a helmet, she wore a maid’s white-brimmed headdress. In her hands she held a staff of gold inlaid with silver.

Player-made items in YGGDRASIL could have their abilities changed by using data crystals. Narberal's robe had a quick-change crystal embedded in it, so she could directly swap out her gear for a set of predetermined equipment without having to waste time changing.

Her cast-off robe now occupied the pocket dimension where they had been.

Khazit narrowed his eyes in puzzlement as he saw the maid before him, and when he finally realized what was going on —

"What?"

—He exclaimed in surprise.

Of course he would have been taken aback when the magic caster before him turned into a maid.

Although he was annoyed by her nonsensical get-up, Narberal's serene expression filled Khazit with a sense of danger. He immediately ordered the Skeletal Dragons to attack. The two Skeletal Dragons drew close to Narberal with surprising speed, swinging their forepaws, which were made of countless bones. Before they could strike home, Narberal cast a spell.

"[Dimensional Move]."

"That again!"

Once more, Narberal vanished without a trace.

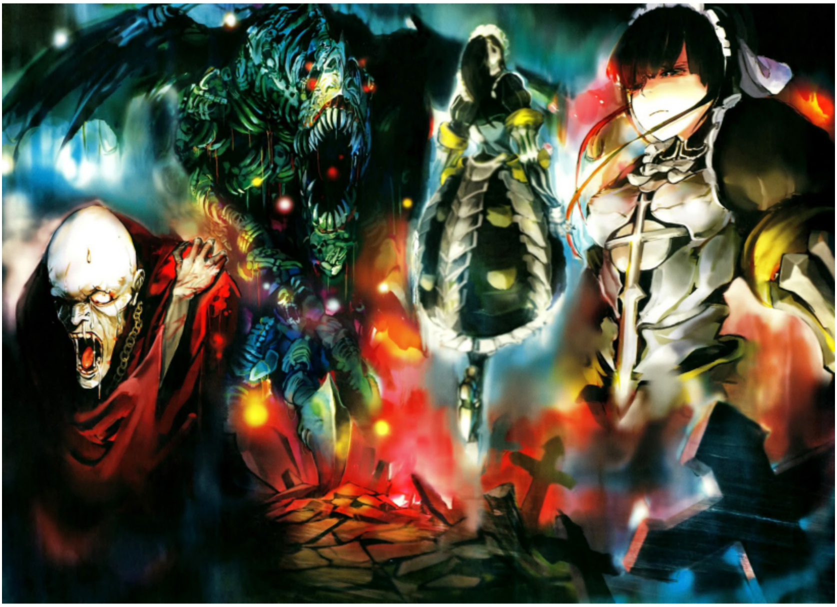
Khazit looked to the sky to look for the missing Narberal as he thought of what had happened earlier. However, it was his pain that told him where Narberal was.

“—Gyaaah!”

Khazit’s wail resounded throughout the graveyard. A searing pain pierced Khazit’s left shoulder, and the pain spread through his body with the pulse of his heartbeat.

A shocked Khazit looked at the wound, at the sharp blade that protruded from the wound.

“—Gah, gaaaah!”



In the next moment, the blade was savagely withdrawn, and pain washed over him again. The sensation of something scraping his bones filled his body, made worse by the agony that gripped him. Thick blood gushed from the wound, staining his black robe.

Drooling from the intense pain, Khazit jerked his head back to see what was going on.

All he saw was Narberal, looking at him curiously.

“Did it hurt that much?”

“—!”

Narberal was holding a black-bladed dagger in the hand that was not holding her staff.

Khazit was in so much pain that he could not speak.

Magic casters typically shunned the frontline, and Khazit was the sort who was served by and dealt out pain to others. Thus, pain was not a common experience for him, which was why his tolerance for it was so low.

Oily sweat beading on his forehead, Khazit issued a mental command to the Skeletal Dragons. Narberal fell back, drawing away from the approaching Skeletal Dragons. The [Fly] spell was faster than the running speed of a normal man.

The two Skeletal Dragons charged into the space left by Narberal.

After hiding in the safe space behind the Skeletal Dragons, Khazit’s calm returned to him, and he finally understood the kind of spell Narberal had used.

That was—

“So it was teleportation magic!”

[Dimensional Move] was a third-tier spell, but to magic casters, it was an escape spell used to put distance between themselves and their adversaries.

However, that was only the case for magic casters, who were an unathletic lot. For a magic caster with fighting prowess that was on par with a warrior, that spell was arguably more valuable than even a weak attack spell, given that it was very difficult to defend against.

Khazit pressed down on his shoulder and glared at Narberal.

“I see, so you were planning to kill me with teleportation! You must have escaped with teleportation as well just now!”

Indeed, it was a tricky trump card to deal with. Since magic was useless against the Skeletal Dragons, the sensible thing was to kill their controller. In addition, with Narberal’s skilful use of teleportation, Khazit would have a very hard time dodging.

However, Narberal casually answered:

“How could that be?”

Khazit could not comprehend what she was saying for a moment, and blinked nonstop. Narberal returned the shortsword to its sheath, and began explaining:

“I was simply demonstrating that I could kill you easily.”

Narberal had shown him how she could turn a thoroughly unfavorable situation around, but she had completely abandoned that method. Khazit had no idea what she was up to.

“…Are you mad?”

“Granted, you are an inferior lifeform (flea), but what kind of answer is that? Use that head of yours a little.”

Khazit shuddered as he saw Narberal’s cold glare.

He was not trembling in anger, but in fear. Unease welled up within Khazit’s mind.

“Well, it’s about time to wrap this up. As a servant, it would be rude of me to keep Ainz-sama waiting… You seem to think magic is useless against Skeletal Dragons. Then, I shall enlighten you, inferior lifeform (shore fly). The fee for that lesson will be your life.”

She released her staff and clapped her hands together. As she drew them apart again, tongues of white lightning arced between them. They took the form of dragons, and the air around them began glowing and crackling with energy.

The white radiance seemed to engulf Narberal.

“…Erk.”

Khazit stared, at a loss for words. He could understand that this was a mighty spell that exceeded his own frame of reference. Amidst the actinic white radiance, the cold smile on Narberal’s face branded itself onto his eyes.

The massive bodies of the Skeletal Dragons loomed before him. As he recalled their existence, an alarm screamed within him.

“—You, you think you can beat Skeletal Dragons, who are immune to all magic? Go! Kill her!”

Khazit’s shouted order was laced with the panic he could no longer hide.

As the two Skeletal Dragons drew close, Narberal laughed. It was the laugh of a merciless master correcting her foolish pupil.

“Immune to all magic? It’s true that Skeletal Dragons resist magic, but that ability only applies to spells of the 6th tier and below.”

The Skeletal Dragons would not reach Narberal for some time yet. During that delay, the strangely calm Khazit finally realised the meaning of Narberal’s words.

“—In other words, Skeletal Dragons cannot resist the spells of a higher tier which I, Narberal Gamma, can use.”

She was not lying. That was what Khazit’s instincts told him.

In other words, this woman could eliminate the Skeletal Dragons and slay Khazit as well—

“Why! My sweat and blood of five years, gone in less than an hour!”

As Khazit let out that mournful wail, countless scenes flashed through his mind, as though he were viewing a zoetrope.

♦♦♦

Khazit Dale Badantel.

Born in a village on the outskirts of the Slaine Theocracy, his mother was a calm, serene woman while his father had a strong body from working in the village. His childhood was mundane.

The reason why he had ended up like this was because he had seen his mother’s corpse.

That day — when the setting sun was clearly visible in the sky — Khazit panted as he ran home. His mother wanted him back earlier, but he had been late because of small things he could not clearly recall. Looking for pretty stones outside the village, playing at being heroes while wielding sticks, all these insignificant things had come together and delayed him.

He ran home, afraid that his mother would scold him, but when he got there, he found his mother collapsed on the ground. He could still clearly remember the warmth of his mother's body when he rushed over to touch her.

He thought it was just a joke, but things turned out otherwise.

Khazit's mother had already departed this world.

According to the clerics, she had died because "she had a blood clot in her brain".

In other words, it was nobody's fault. Nobody was to blame. No. Khazit felt that someone was responsible.

That someone was himself. If only he had returned home earlier, he might have been able to save his mother.

There were many divine magic casters in the Slaine Theocracy, and there were quite a few in Khazit's own village. If only he had begged them for help, perhaps his mother might be well, and still smiling at him.

The person who had caused his beloved mother's face to twist in agony was none other than himself.

Khazit made up his mind to atone for his misdeed — in other words, he would bring his mother back to life.

Yet, the more magic he learned, the bigger the problems he encountered.

There was a resurrection spell in the 5th tier of divine magic, but that spell could not resurrect his mother. Resurrection expended a tremendous amount of life force on the part of the dead person, and the deceased who lacked sufficient life force would not be resurrected, but reduced to ash and dust. His mother did not have the necessary vitality.

Nor did he have the time needed to research a new resurrection spell. However, if he abandoned his humanity and became undead, he might be able to buy himself enough time to eventually develop a new spell to raise the dead.

That was the conclusion which Khazit had arrived at.

He abandoned the divine magic he had studied all his life, and stepped on the path of using arcane magic to become undead. However, there were still obstacles in his way.

After walking the path of an arcane magic caster, he would still need a very long time to become a high-tier undead creature, even after forsaking his humanity. And of course, there might be obstacles in his way, in the form of talent and ability, and he might not even be able to become undead in the first place.

One of the way to overcome these obstacles was to gather a massive amount of negative energy — yes, by killing an entire city's worth of people — and turning them into undead in order to harness the negative energy they would generate.

And then, just as his wish was nearly granted, another obstacle appeared in his way.

◆◆◆

“I spent five years preparing in this city! I’ve held onto this dream for 30 years! What gives you the right to destroy all of this?! You, who appeared out of nowhere?!”

Khazit’s cry was answered by cold laughter.

“I have no interest in the dreams of inferior lifeforms (you). Although, your so-called effort did manage to make me laugh. Still, I do have some words for you… well done on becoming a stepping stone for Ainz-sama.”

“[Twin Maximize Magic - Chain Dragon Lightning].”

A roaring, coiling stream of dragon-shaped lightning appeared around both of Narberal’s hands.

The lightning discharges were wider than her arms, and they struck the Skeletal Dragons. The vast white buddies shuddered from the impact. The twin lightning blasts wrapped around the Skeletal Dragons’ bodies, burning the false life that animated their corpses out of existence.

The end came in an instant.

Under the power of the magic lightning, the Skeletal Dragons and their supposed absolute immunity to magic were torn asunder.

Even though the Skeletal Dragons had been disintegrated, the lightning strikes did not disappear. The two arcs of dragon-shaped lightning seemed to be searching for their quarry, then they raised their heads and sprang at their final prey.

Khazit's vision was obliterated in a sea of white.

He had no time to beg for mercy, nor did he have time to scream.

The tears at the corners of his eyes flashed into steam, leaving behind a whispered "Mum—". The searing light consumed Khazit, and the lightning pierced him without mercy.

Khazit's body went into full-body seizures, as though he were performing some strange dance where he stood.

The current penetrated deep into Khazit's body and ignited him from the inside. After it had vanished, the smoking Khazit collapsed to the ground.

The stench of burning flesh filled the air.

Narberal shrugged, and muttered something to the pile of scorched meat that had once been Khazit:

“Even inferior lifeforms (insects) smell good after they’ve been roasted… I wonder if it would be fine to give him to Entoma as a present…”

A mocking smile came over Narberal’s face as she mentioned the name of her human-eating colleague.

♦♦♦

The warrior spread his arms, as though he was going to hug someone.

“…Now what tricks are you up to, hm!? Giving up already?”

“Giving up? Since I’ve given Narberal her orders, I should wrap things up here as well.”

“What? What nonsense are you babbling—? You think you can beat, the great Clementine without any martial arts? You’re pissing me off.”

“I have to say, the ravings of a weakling like yourself are quite impressive.”

Clementine wanted to retort with “That would be you, right?” but she suppressed the boiling rage in her heart.

The man before her did not have much in the way of combat skills, but he possessed superhuman physical abilities. As far as she knew, said abilities were second only to those of the two God-Kin — the Black Scripture's Extra Seat and its First Seat (who was also the Black Scripture's leader). Therefore, the way he swung his weapons at his whim became an unpredictable attack and defense, and if she was not careful, she might be killed in a single blow.

Clementine faked her usual sneer, and taunted him in turn:

"…Forget it. You're right, we should wrap things up quickly."

Momon the warrior simply shrugged.

Clementine eyed his stance. There were openings everywhere in his stance, but that could not possibly be all there was to him. It was a trap.

However, Clementine had no choice. Her words from earlier might have sounded like a joke, but she meant them. She could probably escape from here by borrowing the power of the Skeletal Dragons, but that was only if she did not waste any more time. Though she had come along to avoid the agents of the Windflower Scripture, she had wasted too much time on playing.

Clementine slowly sank into a crouch, strengthening her grip on her stiletto.

She had to finish this fight quickly, preferably with a single stroke.

Part of that was because she no longer had time to waste, but it was also because the attacks and parries of the man before her were gradually becoming more and more competent. It would be best to kill him now before he grew to a point where she could no longer do so.

Clementine exhaled loudly and then she surged forward.

[Gale Stride]. [Greater Evasion]. [Ability Boost]. [Greater Ability Boost]. Those were the same four techniques she had used earlier, in an attempt to shrink the gap between their physical abilities. In addition, she still had room to use other techniques, no matter what Momon tried.

In this high-speed world, she was fully aware of anything her opponent could do.

He might draw his swords from the ground to attack, or use a martial art, or an unarmed strike, or a hidden weapon… no, he might use a thrown weapon instead.

Clementine guessed that there were dozens of tactics her foe could employ, and she was confident that she could defeat each and every one of them.

However, every single one of her guesses fell short of the mark.

—Because her opponent did nothing.

The dark warrior stretched out his arms, waiting for the attack.

A shiver ran down her spine. This was the fear of something beyond her imagination, a fear of the unknown.

Should she charge bravely forward, or back off and flee?

Those were the only two options left to her.

Clementine was cruel and merciless, but she was no fool. In that fraction of a second, she worked out countless possibilities and countermeasures.

In the end, it was her pride and her confidence in her abilities which spurred Clementine on.

Though she had betrayed them, she had once been a member of the Slaine Theocracy's strongest special operations group — the Black Scripture. There were probably less than ten warriors who could defeat her. It was unthinkable that she should flee from Momon, an unknown fighter with hardly any skills to speak of.

Once she made her decision, the rest was easy. There was no need to hesitate any further. As she recovered the composure of a first-rate warrior, Clementine sprinted for Momon's chest — so fast it seemed they were going to embrace each other.

"Die—!"

Using all the muscles in her body, Clementine thrust her stiletto into the vision slit of Momon’s full helm. Then she twisted it, as though intending to cause further damage to the surrounding organs while driving it deeper into his head. All this was to inflict a fatal blow.

Although his armored hands drew closer, as if to hug her, she paid it no heed and followed up on her attack.

In keeping with Clementine’s desire to deal a fatal strike, she unleashed the spell stored within the stiletto. That spell was called [Lightning].

Lightning bolts shot through Ainz’s body.

Clementine’s weapons possessed a Magic Accumulate enchantment. She could store a spell within the weapon and release it later. Although the act of doing so would expend the spell, that stored spell could be just about any sort of magic. Thus, it was a handy enchantment which allowed her to prepare for just about any situation with the right stored spell.

She drove the stiletto deep into his skull and then released a lightning attack on top of it — this was certainly a fatal blow.

However—

“I’m not done yet! [Flow Acceleration]!”

Even faster than before, she drove another stiletto into the full helm’s vision slit, and then released the [Fireball] spell locked within. In her mind, Clementine saw Momon’s body burning within his armor, and she imagined she could smell his scorched and blackened flesh.

However, Clementine’s eyes went wide in shock, as she was confronted by an unexpected sight.

“Hm, I see. YGGDRASIL did not have magic weapons like this. Well, this is an eye-opener.”

Despite having stilettos stabbed through both his eye sockets, Ainz was still muttering casually to himself. Clementine then realized that there had been no blood when she stabbed him.

“No way! Impossible! Why aren’t you dead?!”

She had never heard of a martial art like this which could make people invincible. Or had he used some other method to deal with her stabs? If that were the case, how had he stopped the follow-up magical attacks?

Even a hardened veteran like Clementine had no answer to those questions.

“!?”

Clementine’s body was swallowed in an embrace, and she was now pressed against Momon. The adventurers’ plates rattled.

“Shall I tell you the answer?”

The jet-black full plate vanished, revealing a terrible face beneath.

It was a fleshless skull. Her stilettos protruded from his empty eye sockets — through the Black Mirrorshades covering them — but it did not seem to be in the slightest bit of pain.

Clementine knew what that face meant.

“Undead… an Elder Lich?!”

“…? …Well, I had a lot of questions to ask you, but I guess not. All I can say is that your answer came quite close. Then—”

The monster before her had neither skin nor flesh, and so it should not have an expression on its face. Yet, Clementine had the feeling that it was smiling at her.

“How does it feel? How does it feel to fight a magic caster with sword in hand? How does it feel to be unable to finish things in a heartbeat?”

“Don’t, don’t look down on me!”

Clementine used all her strength to struggle free, but she was held immobile, as though by sturdy chains.

Elder Liches were powerful undead who were skilled in the use of magic attacks, but their physical abilities were not very impressive. Clementine should have had the advantage.

However —

“W-why?!”

—She could not get free.

Once she realized that the mighty arm which held her — in other words, his physical strength — was not the result of his armor’s enchantment, Clementine froze. What she saw in her mind was a butterfly trapped in a spider’s web, with no way out.

“…This is what I meant by a handicap. Simply put, there was no need for me to go all out — that is to say, cast a spell — against an opponent like you.”

“Son of a bitch—!”

“Well then, since the truth’s out, let’s begin… but first, these are in the way.”

There was a grinding sound as the Elder Lich pulled out the stilettos which had been stabbed into its eyes and cast them aside. As the undead creature did this, Clementine was still struggling for dear life, but even her full strength could not compare to the power in just a single arm of his. All she could do was squirm helplessly within his embrace, unable to move.

After the two stilettos were drawn out, an evil red light remained in those empty eye sockets. They looked down on the panting, gasping Clementine as she exerted herself.

“Now then, shall we begin?”

Clementine — who was on guard against anything her opponent might try to pull ever since she heard the word “begin” — felt herself being drawn nearer to the Elder Lich, closer than even lovers were.

After that, she heard a strange creaking sound.

Clementine understood what the Elder Lich was doing as a chill ran down her spine, as though she had been impaled by an icicle.

“…No… no way, you bastard—!”

The creaking sound was the bending of armor.

—He was planning to crush her flat against his own chest.

Of course her own armor would press against the Elder Lich’s chest, but he must have used some method to harden his own body. His immovable body was like a sturdy, thick wall.

“Perhaps if you were weaker…”

The Elder Lich withdrew a dagger from somewhere. It was black, with four jewels set into its hilt.

“I thought about using this to finish you off… but well, isn’t it all the same if you get stabbed to death by a sword, die by having your spine broken, or get crushed to death? In the end, you die.”

Clementine’s body shuddered.

His casual tone caused panic to bloom in her heart, and the crushing pressure on her chest grew. The metal plates taken from the adventurers she had killed could no longer bear the strain, and they scattered to the ground like they were being buried.

The first to fall were the four silver plates which she had recently acquired.

It was frightening how it was becoming more and more painful to breathe.

She hated the arm at her back, the one which held her.

She resented herself for wearing light armor to increase her evasive ability and to display her adventurer’s plate trophies.

Clementine knew that swords were useless against the Elder Lich, and so she punched wildly at his face. However, that hurt Clementine more than it did him. Then, as the pain set in, she reached for her morningstar to maul him, but she was not used to wielding it and injured herself instead.

She could clearly see the fate awaiting her. From how the act of breathing was getting more and more difficult, the ever-increasing pressure on her belly, her slowly deforming armor, she knew exactly what was going to happen to her.

“Don’t bother struggling. Do you think I can’t end this quickly just by changing where my arm is pressing? You took your time killing them, so I’m going to take my time killing you as well.”

Clementine desperately flailed at him.

She tried to push his face away, scratched at him until her nails nearly came off, even tried biting him — but nothing she did worked, and the unbearable pressure kept increasing.

No matter how hard she struggled, she could not break free of the arm binding her. Even so, Clementine kept squirming, betting everything for a slim chance at hope even as it became difficult to breathe and her vision began blacking out.

“Is this the dance of death?”

She did not even have the strength to hear those whispered words.

There was the sound of retching, and then vomit spewed over Ainz’s body. The scarlet points of light in Ainz’s eyes dimmed slightly.

Clementine, who had been desperately swinging her arms about in the hope of escaping, was now a spasming lump of meat.

Still, Ainz did not loosen his grip, but tightened it further. Soon, the feeling of thick bones breaking ran up through Ainz's arms.

He released the body, which could not even twitch any more.

Clementine's body thudded heavily on the ground, like a sack of rubbish. Her face was a hideous blend of agony and terror. Like a deep-sea fish brought up to the surface, one could see her internal organs in her mouth.

Ainz took out his Pitcher of Endless Water, and used its ever-flowing stream of clean water to rid himself of the vomit that stuck to his body. At the same time, he spoke casually to Clementine, who could no longer answer him:

"I forgot to tell you… but I am a terrible hypocrite."

Part 5

Just as Ainz was starting to get annoyed by having to wet his clothes while cleaning his body, he heard a huge object approaching fast. He turned toward the source of the sound, and as it turned out, it was Hamsuke.

Hamsuke's fighting power was far weaker than that of Ainz or Narberal. Allowing it to fight would only lead to unnecessary injuries.

Therefore, he ordered it to stand by some distance away. It must have come because it could not hear the sound of fighting any more.

He recognized the expression on the giant hamster’s adorable face — it was worried for Ainz — and he went a little weak.

The giant hamster, which did not know what its master was thinking, approached Ainz with unexpected speed and then looked around. When it locked eyes with Ainz:

“Geh—!”

It flipped over and bared its belly while wailing:

“…There’s a horrible monster here! Milord! Milord~!”

Ainz grabbed his head, all the strength fleeing his body. Come to think of it, he had not yet shown Hamsuke his true form. However, he could not let it continue making a racket here. As he looked to the graveyard wall in the distance, he saw that the adventurers were still battling the Wraiths. Judging by distance alone they should not be able to hear Hamsuke, but there was no guarantee of that.

In a stern tone, Ainz scolded Hamsuke:

“…That’s enough clowning around from you.”

“Oh? That manly and commanding voice… could it be milord?”

“…Indeed. That’s why I want you to keep your voice down.”

“Unbelievable! This is more than what I expected… though I long knew milord was possessed of tremendous power… this Hamsuke’s faithful loyalty to you is redoubled!”

“Is that so. However, I’ll say it again — keep your voice down.”

“That, that’s cruel, milord! Please do not make light of your servant’s pledge of loyalty!”

“…Did you not hear what Ainz-sama said? Fool.”

Part of Hamsuke’s body flattened as it was kicked into the distance. In place of its body was Narberal’s foot, which she slowly withdrew.

“Ainz-sama, there should be no value in raising this foolish lifeform. Would you allow your loyal servant to incinerate it with lightning?”

“No… being known as the one who commands the Wise King of the Forest is quite worthwhile. Having it alive and well on our travels is beneficial to us. Back to the point — Narberal, time is short. Go loot their bodies. We might need to turn their possessions over to the local authorities, so we need to ascertain the value of those objects first.”

“Understood.”

“I will be in the chapel. Take care of the rest.”

“Yes! Then… what about the corpses? Should we take them back to Nazarick?”

“No. We might need to hand over the masterminds behind the incident, so just take their equipment.”

“Understood.”

“Owie…”

Hamsuke — who had just run back — sighed with deliberate loudness. Narberal glared coldly at him:

“Ainz-sama’s words are more important than anything you have to say. This is basic knowledge for one of his servants. A lifeform like you is the lowest-ranked of all his minions, so you will either pay attention or I will kill you on the spot.”

Hamsuke shivered.

“Next time, it will not be a physical attack, but magic. For the crime of disobeying Ainz-sama, you will suffer until you pray for death.”

“I understand… please do not put on that scary face… although, I was quite surprised by how majestic he looked. It was quite impressive.”

Narberal’s expression softened a little and she said:

“Indeed. Ainz-sama cuts an impressive figure. At least you have good taste.”

“Thank you for your praise. But if that is how milord looks, then do you have another face as well, Narberal-dono?”

“…I am a Doppelganger. This face of mine is made by my own innate abilities. Watch.”

She removed a glove and revealed a hand with only three fingers, which were longer than human fingers. They resembled the bodies of peppered moths.

“I, I see…”

“Don’t look so surprised. You’re a servant in the Great Tomb of Nazarick as well, so don’t make such a big deal over such small things. Anyway, I’m going to strip the magic items from the corpses, so come along and help me.”

“Yes! Understood!”

♦♦♦

The boy (Nfirea) was in the chapel. As Ainz looked at him, the red light in his eye sockets dimmed.

He wore a strange, transparent outfit which drew attention to his body, but Ainz's attention was on his face.

Someone had cut him across the face and punctured his eyes. From the tear-shaped clots of reddish-black blood that wept down his cheeks, it was clear that he was blind.

“Well… blindness can be cured… magic really is convenient.”

The question now was Nfirea's current condition.

He had been standing up here, but had not reacted to Ainz's arrival. Even if his eyes could not see, he should have known that someone was coming. However, there was no reaction, which implied one thing — mind control. The question now was what sort of control he was under.

“It must be this.”

Ainz's gaze settled on the spiderweb-like crown which rested on Nfirea's head. Or rather, it would be better to say that nothing else looked more suspicious than it.

Just as he reached out to remove the crown, Ainz stopped himself halfway. Since he did not know what had caused this, he should not make any careless moves. Therefore, Ainz cast a spell on the crown.

“[All Appraisal Magic Item].”

In YGGDRASIL, this spell would tell its caster about a magic item’s creator and manufacturer. The spell could also be cast here. No, beyond that, information which could not appear in YGGDRASIL showed up in Ainz’s mind.

“The Crown of Wisdom… I see. However… this item’s abilities don’t exist in YGGDRASIL… so it’s a magic item that could not have existed in YGGDRASIL.”

Ainz sighed after learning all this, and began thinking about what to do next.

He was mainly concerned about the benefits of bringing Nfirea back to the Great Tomb of Nazarick. The prospect of gaining a rare magic item and an equally rare talent-holder was very attractive.

However, his hesitation only lasted for a moment.

“Since I accepted this task, failing it on purpose would stain the name of Ainz Ooal Gown.”

“[Greater Break Item].”

Ainz cast a spell on the crown. The sight of it decomposing into sparkling dust was quite beautiful.

Ainz tenderly embraced the limp youth and gently laid him on the ground. Then he examined Nfirea's face.

"After this… all I need to do is heal his eyes… though I probably shouldn't do that here."

Ainz touched his face and then rose slowly. The undead he had summoned had not been completely wiped out yet, but he sensed that some of them had already been destroyed. Soon, the reinforcements — or rather, interfering busybodies — would find this place. Before that, he had to recast his facial illusion and remake his swords and armor.

He also had to recover their magic items quickly.

Unlike how things were when he PKed in YGGDRASIL, he could take all their weapons and gear for this own. It pleased him.

As he looked back to see if he needed to help Narberal collect the equipment, she appeared at the entrance of the chapel.

"Ainz-sama."

"What's the matter? Have you already collected the enemy's gear? How about their cash?"

"Yes. However, there is something I wanted to consult you about, concerning this."

Narberal advanced into the chapel, a black orb in her hand. It looked uneven, like a pebble one might find by the side of a river, and it did not seem very valuable.

“…What is that?”

“It seems to be something which the inferior lifeform (flatworm) I fought treasured deeply. However, I do not know what effects it has…”

“Is that so.”

Narberal the NPC knew far fewer spells than Ainz, and most of them were combat spells. This was why she could not appraise its value.

Ainz picked up the orb, and cast the same spell he had just now.

“[All Appraisal Magic Item].”

The red points of light which served as Ainz’s eyes lit up.

“What is this…? The Orb of Death? And… it’s an intelligent magic item?”

The Orb of Death was an impressive name, but it was hardly outstanding.

It aided in controlling the undead, and it could cast several different necromantic spells every day, but none of those appealed to Ainz. It also had the drawback of mentally dominating humans who held it, although Ainz and Narberal —, who possessed defenses against mind-affecting effects — were immune, as were demihumans or heteromorphic creatures.

“What a strange item…”

The only thing which intrigued him was the fact that it was an intelligent magic item.

Ainz poked it lightly, and just as he was about to command it to speak, there was a voice in his head.

“—Greetings to you, oh mighty King of Death.”

Those words echoed within his skull. Ainz continued looking at the Orb. In a world of monsters and magic, this was hardly something to shout about.

“Umu, it really is an intelligent magic item.”

Ainz nimbly rolled the Orb from hand to hand, and then continued examining it. However, the Orb did not show any sign of wanting to speak. Ainz pondered the situation, and then after deciding a possible reason for this, he said:

“I permit you to speak.”

“—You have my deepest thanks, mighty King of Death.”

This reaction reminded Ainz of the loyal NPCs of Nazarick, and he chuckled.

“—Please accept the utmost respect of this one for the absolute aura of Death which surrounds you.”

I should have dispelled all my auras. Why does this item keep calling me the King of Death?

“I shall permit it.”

“—My deepest thanks, oh supreme overlord of Death. I am deeply grateful to all the forms of death which exist within this world that I could encounter an exalted being like yourself.”

Though the Orb was laying it on a bit thick, those words seemed sincere enough. It made Ainz’s back itch a little, so he thrust his chest forward and said:

“And? Can you speak anything besides flattery?”

“—Yes. This one deeply apologizes for this thoughtless request, but this one has a wish that it hopes you will help to grant.”

“What wish?”

“—Yes. This one has always felt that it had come to this world in

order to spread death, but after meeting a mighty King of Death like yourself, this one realised that it had been truly born in order to serve you."

"…Oh."

"—Oh mighty King of Death, please accept this one's fealty. This one hopes to have a place among your faithful servants."

It sounded sincere enough, and if it had a head, it would probably have been lowered. Ainz pressed his knuckles to his mouth and began thinking. He had to consider the merits and demerits of taking it as a minion, whether it was reliable, and so on.

Ainz examined the magic item again. For safety's sake, he should probably destroy it. However, something like this did not exist in YGGDRASIL, so destroying it would be a waste.

After casting several protective spells on the Orb, Ainz called out to the giant hamster that had entered the chapel.

"Hamsuke."

"What does milord desire?"

"Take it."

Ainz tossed the Orb he was holding, and Hamsuke nimbly caught it.

“May I ask milord about this item?”

“It’s a magic item. You can use it, right?”

“Mm… I should be able to! But it’s noisy! It’s so loud I want to return it to milord.”

Narberal looked at Hamsuke, her eyes wide.

“Are you giving it to the newcomer?”

Ainz could tell from the way she had lost control of her voice that Narberal was deeply shaken.

“Though I’ve already cast anti-detection spells on it, I can’t say it’s perfectly safe, so it’s better to hand it to Hamsuke.”

“I see! As expected of Ainz-sama. Your wise judgements are impeccable.”

Before him were Narberal and Hamsuke, who was bowing. Its cheeks were larger than a human’s fists.

Just as he was about to order them to fall back, Ainz noticed his bright red cape. On a whim, he grabbed its hem.

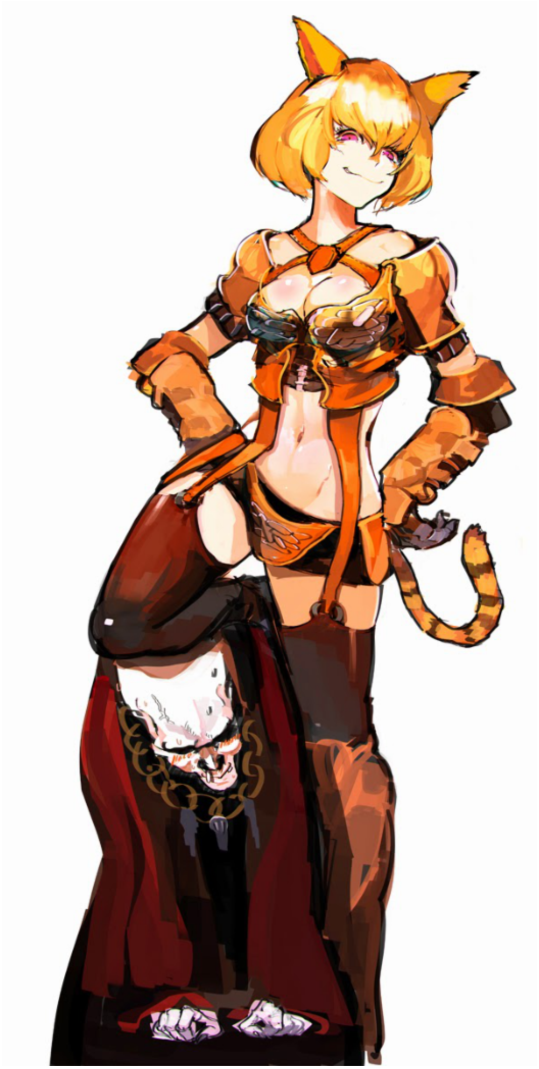
“Now then. If the recovery is complete, then let us take Nfirea—”

Ainz flourished his red cape in a grandiose manner.

“—And return in triumph.”

Overlord Volume 2 Chapter 5

Epilogue



Translator: Nigel
Proofreader/Editor: JcqC

He pushed open the doors to the inn where he had stayed earlier. The inn went silent, and countless eyes focused themselves on Ainz. This time, nobody obstructed him, and he came before the innkeeper.

“You…”

The eyes of the innkeeper and the inn’s patrons were all drawn to the metal plate around Ainz’s neck.

In a casual tone which sounded like he was smiling, Ainz said:

“A double room.”

After putting down the silver piece, he took the keys from the speechless innkeeper.

And so, Ainz entered his room, where he dispelled his magic and resumed his true face.

The mithril plate around his neck clinked loudly against the Nemean Lion Pendant. He had explained his part in last night’s activities in the graveyard, and had been awarded that metal plate.

The reason why the inn had gone silent was because of that plate. A man who had been a copper plate adventurer several days ago had now risen quickly through the ranks when they saw him again. This was beyond their ability to comprehend.

Their honest reaction filled Ainz with a sense of superiority, as well as dissatisfaction. In his heart, he had been hoping to be promoted all the way to orichalcum rank, but he had only managed the rank before that. What would they have done if he had really obtained an orichalcum plate?

Still, this was not an entirely impossible feat.

Only a small amount of people knew about this matter. However, when he narrated the events at the guild, Ainz's accomplishments were truly unbelievable. Though he could have been elevated to adamantite rank right away, that had not happened because Ainz had no prior accomplishments and the investigations into the matter were not complete. Therefore, the Guild had decided to be prudent about this.

In other words, the Guild already thought of Ainz as an equal to the two adamantite-ranked adventurer parties in the Kingdom.

In addition, as time went by, the story of the battle in the graveyard, as well as the great name of Ainz — Momon would certainly spread throughout the city. This was because the fleeing guards talked about the exploits of Ainz.

The plan had gone so smoothly that Ainz could not help but smile. No, it had not gone smoothly; it had gone perfectly.

Ainz flicked the mithril plate with a finger, and then Narberal asked the question in her heart.

"May I ask how we should deal with those two? They said they would contact us about the appropriate remuneration."

Narberal was referring to Nfirea and Lizzie Bareare — the two herbalists. Ainz had already decided how to deal with them.

"Lizzie said she would pay everything she had. Therefore, I will have her bring her grandson to Carne Village. She will make potions for me — no, for the Great Tomb of Nazarick."

"…There are people who can make potions in Nazarick as well. Why must you specially engage these lower lifeforms (penis fishes) to do so as well?"

"It's because I want a new source of power."

Narberal stared dumbfoundedly and did not respond, so Ainz continued:

"I have considered that potion ingredients might run dry, so it is necessary to develop potion-making methods other than those of Yggdrasil. In addition, we might be able to combine the methods of this world and Yggdrasil, thus opening up a new avenue of power for us. After all, we might have already fallen behind by 600 years. Of course, we'll need to sternly warn her not to spread the means of making those potions… but looking at her, it seems that won't be a problem."

Ainz recalled Lizzie's reaction when he brought Nfirea back to her.

He had already healed Nfirea's eyes, but he was still semi-conscious due to the tremendous shock he had received. Even so, when Lizzie learned that her grandson's life was no longer in danger, she wept copiously, and swore that she would pay Ainz what she had promised.

"Let's leave Lizzie aside for now. There's something more important to take care of."

Ainz cast the [Message] spell and contacted Albedo.

He had received Entoma's [Message] earlier, but since he was not free to talk earlier, Ainz could only tell her not to worry too much about things. After that, he had been far too busy to talk.

After the [Message] connected to Albedo, the first thing she said far exceeded his imagination.

『—Ainz-sama. Shalltear Bloodfallen has rebelled against us.』

For a moment, he had no idea what those words meant. After they slowly filtered into his mind, Ainz’s reaction was like that of a moron.

“…Hah?”

Overlord Volume 2 Afterword

Volume 2 Chapter 06 - Afterword

Postscript by So-bin
YOUTH IS A GOOD THING
I DREW VOLUME 3 WHILE SMILING HAPPILY... IT'S GREAT TO BE YOUNG.
So-Bin

Greetings, dear readers, it’s been a while. This is Maruyama Kugane.

I have a small tale to tell from when I was redoing the battle scenes.

When I was acting out the movements in real life, I accidentally knocked over a cup full of cafe au lait with my left hand. I almost cried when the coffee-colored liquid sprayed everywhere. Though my bed was slightly stained, it was not a large patch, and the manuscript was unharmed, so I guess it was not that bad. If any of you readers are interested, you can try looking for the scene where I spilled my cafe au lait.

It is the scene which smells of milk.

Amidst all of these trials and tribulations was born Overlord 2: Warrior of Darkness. I would be glad if you enjoyed it.

I trust you can recommend this story to those people who are tired of the cliche of saving the damsel in distress. Since men and women are equal, then saving a male character should be fine, right? Although the protagonist always thinks of his own gain in everything he does, It would please me if you enjoyed a character like him who is motivated by self-interest.

Then, I will express my thanks next.

First, thank you to So-bin-sama, who drew the beautiful illustration for this book as well. The final product was more exciting than I imagined, and thanks to the art, I redid some of the battle scenes.

Thank you to Chord Design Studio, who once again helped me to produce an exquisite book cover and binding. I'm also very grateful to Ohaku-sama, who helped proofread some of the more difficult parts to understand. Thank you for this time as well, Editor F-Da-sama, I know I've caused a lot of trouble for you. Please add a little more red for me! No, I know it's better not to have it...

Also, to my university friend Honey -- thanks for this time too.

And last but not least, to the gentle readers who bought this book, as well as the online friends who gave their feedback while the webnovel was still running, thank you very much. Your remarks have always been a source of motivation for me.

Then, the next volume… it should be easier than this one… do I have to read it again? I don’t really want to...

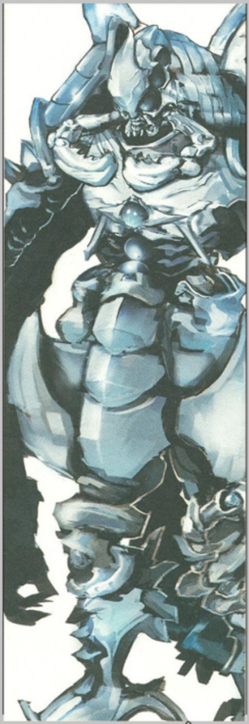
No, as an author, I can do it for the sake of producing an interesting work… oh, that’s enough of my mumbling. It’s about time I bade you all farewell.

I will continue working hard, and I hope to see you again in the third volume.

See you again.

2012/11
Maruyama Kugane

Character 5



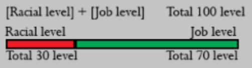
コキュートス

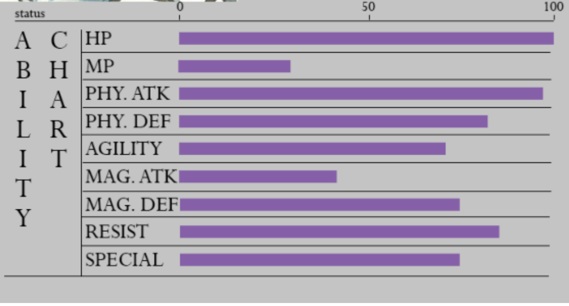
Heteromorphic Race

cocytus

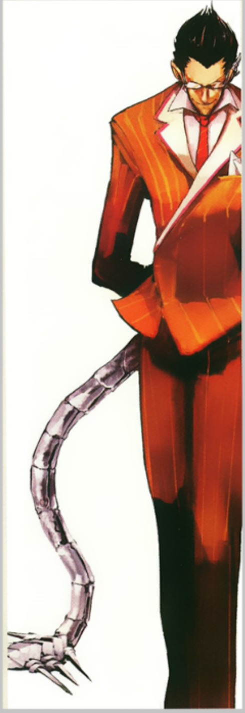
RULER OF GLACIERS

Job	Great Tomb of Nazarick 5th Floor Guardian		
Residence	5th Floor Snowball Earth		
Alignment	Neutral	Sense of Justice:	50
Racial Level	Insect Fighter		10 lv
	Vermin Lord		10 lv
	Others		
Job Level	Sword Saint		10 lv
	Asura		5 lv
	Knight of Niflheim		5 lv
	Others		





Character 6



デミウルゴス

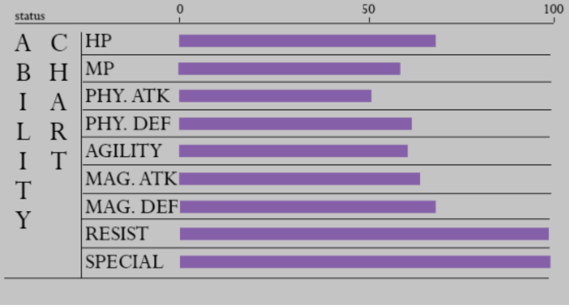
Heteromorphic
Race

demiurge

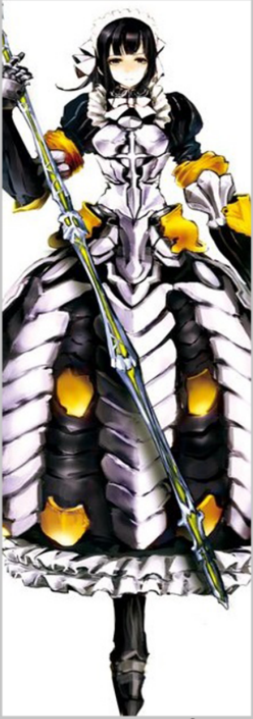
CREATOR OF BLAZING INFERNO

Job	Great Tomb of Nazarick 7th Floor Guardian	
Residence	7th Floor Blazing Shrine	
Alignment	Extreme Evil	Sense of Justice: -500
Racial Level	Imp	10 lv
	Archdevil	5 lv
	Others	
Job Level	Chaos	10 lv
	Prince of Darkness	10 lv
	Shapeshifter	10 lv
	Others	

[Racial level] + [Job level] Total 100 level



Character 7



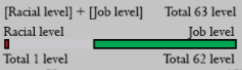
ナーベラル・ガンマ

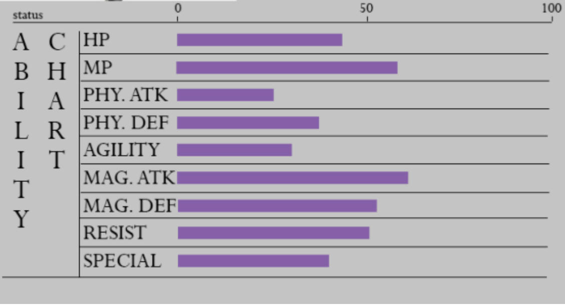
Heteromorphic Race

narberal gamma (Γ)

INFLEXIBLE BATTLE MAID

Job	Great Tomb of Nazarick Battle Maid	
Residence	One of the servant rooms in floor 9	
Alignment	Great Evil	Sense of Justice: -400
Racial Level	Doppelganger	1 lv
Job Level	Fighter	1 lv
	Battle mage	10 lv
	Elementalist (Air)	10 lv
	Armored Mage	10 lv
	Others	



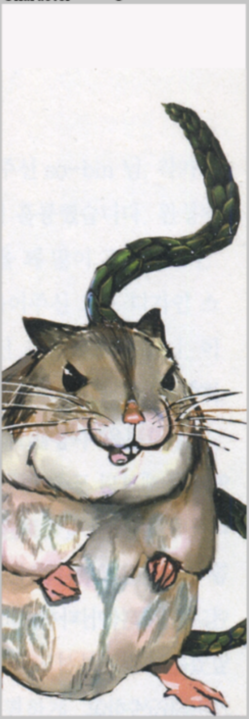


Character 8

ハムスケ

Heteromorphic

Character 8



ハムスケ

Heteromorphic
Race

hamusuke

VIRTUOUS KING OF THE FOREST

(UNDESERVED TITLE *-AINZ*)

Job	Ainz's Pet? (Objection *-Some of the female NPC*)
Residence	Ainz's room?
Alignment	Neutral
Sense of Justice:	0
Racial Level	Unknown, no corresponding race in Yggdrasil.
Job Level	Unknown, no corresponding job in Yggdrasil. *Estimated to be above level 30